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COOLIE CARTOGRAPHY
CROSSING FRONTIERS THROUGH COOLITUDE

One Volume

By

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of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

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Declaration

I declare that the research presented in this thesis is entirely my own work and that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Abstract

Following the abolition of Transatlantic slavery, the British introduced a new scheme of labour to replace the former. 'Indian indentureship', as it was referred to, affected nearly 2 million Indian coolies who defied the traditional ban against crossing the *kala pani* (dark waters) in order to work on plantations in countries such as British Guiana, Trinidad, Malaya, South Africa and Fiji. In effect, the Indian labour diaspora emerged and established itself across the globe. Despite over 100 years of labouring and contributing to the development of their new homes, the coolies and their descendents still face political, social and cultural marginalization.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the consequences of indentureship in various societies through a parallelization of inter-national coolie conditions as represented by writers of the diaspora. The three areas selected for this study are Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji. David Dabydeen (Guyana), K.S. Maniam (Malaysia) and Satendra Nandan (Fiji) all share the impetus to disclose the past as a portal into the present, thereby disrupting normative time, and by implication, a fixed sense of history. However, the most striking similarity between these writers, despite their geographical and social distance, is their literary method which centres on the theory of coolitude. Coolitude was coined by Khal Torabully as a means of recuperating the voiceless coolie, firstly, by re-membering the sea voyage across the *kala pani* and secondly, by highlighting the coolie's place in the mosaic of multicultural societies.

Chapter 1 details the historical, theoretical and methodical foundations of the thesis. Chapter 2 explores Dabydeen's novels *The Counting House* and *Our Lady of Demerara* while Chapter 3 is a detailed study of Maniam's novels *The Return* and *In A Far Country*. The final chapter considers Nandan's novel *The Wounded Sea* and collection of poetry *Lines Across Black Waters*. Each literary analysis seeks to understand how coolitude, as a means to historically and politically place the coolie in the current world, links spaces between countries both through a shared colonial history and a common postcolonial condition.

Preface

This study is concerned with the representations of the Indian coolie diaspora in the literature of selected areas affected by 19th century Indian indentureship. While ‘Indian diaspora’ is a generic term utilised to classify the multiple mass migrations of Indians from India which occurred for various reasons and at various times, ‘coolie diaspora’ is used here to denote a *specific* aspect of the Indian diaspora, possessing its own historical substance with its plural implications of subjugation (both coerced and ‘willing’) and class. Furthermore, the term ‘coolie’ transcends ethnic enclosures, which fits the quiddity of the present work that both seeks to define Indian ‘coolieness’, and break away from it. The application of the word ‘coolie’ itself is diverse. Hugh Tinker suggests its varied roots in Chinese where ‘ku’ means bitter and ‘li’ signifies strength and in Tamil, where ‘coolie’ is associated with wages. The term was also used by Portuguese captains and merchants whose usage of the word was then transferred to other Europeans involved in trade with them. Khal Torabully has also associated the term with the *Kula* tribe residing in the Gangetic region. Within the present text, coolieness will also be studied, in the works of certain writers, in relation to Chinese indentured labour. But it must be noted that this approach does not attempt to erase race in favour of a proletariat class, which runs the danger of eliminating the ‘Indianness’ of the coolie diaspora, which at the present moment is imperative, considering its under-representation. It seeks to combine race and class for a better understanding of this period of labour and migration, while at the same time considering the implications of this phenomenon on three different coolie communities. Prioritisation is on the representations of coolies that share common problems but are uniquely influenced by particular social and cultural contexts.

The reasons for selecting the three areas of Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji are threefold. Firstly, the Indian communities share a history of coolie indentureship and migration, and have consequently faced political and racial difficulties in comfortably establishing themselves in their respective countries. Guyana has experienced and is experiencing racial tensions, as is Fiji, and Malaysia, on a more subtle albeit existent level. The writers then are more inclined to focus on the recuperation of history and politics. It is noted that because the Indians in Guyana and, until recently following the coups, in Fiji, are a majority, and the Indians in Malaysia only constitute 8% of the total population, the modes of cultural establishments and their political expectations differ. But the aim of the thesis is to understand the coolie diaspora as one that manages to trace similarities even within communities that *appear* disengaged from one another. Thus, the literary analysis will attempt to show that labour migration had similar effects on coolies ‘dispersed’ across the globe despite geographical distance from one another, while exploring with interest the differences in patterns of adjustment in each community.

Secondly, the study of the representations of Indians in these three areas has not, to my knowledge, been attempted before. Thus, it opens new spaces and possibilities of linkage between coolies and their descendents and brings forward a new way of perceiving labour migration and its consequent diaspora as an historical event that was far from regionally-specific.

Thirdly, the decision was as much literary as it was historical and political. The ways in which the writers chosen for the present study rehabilitate ‘coolieness’ complement one another in their vision of cultural interplay and identity construction, which are further conjoined by the application of the theory of coolitude to their work. It should also be noted that the three writers are all male. The lack or virtual absence

of Indian female writers in Malaysia and Fiji has made this decision necessary. There are of course Indo-Caribbean female writers such as Ramabhai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, Lakshmi Persaud and Mahadai Das to explore, but the selection of the Caribbean writer was made in consideration of the rest of the thesis, i.e., the Malaysian and Fijian literary scope, and the feasibility of comparing writers from an unequal gender base. The issue of gender will, nevertheless, be studied but in the context of a male authorial perspective.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the historical context of Indian indentured labour in the 19th century. The build-up towards the inception of what some critics have regarded as a 'new system of slavery' is examined through a wide colonial frame, dating from 1492 when the era of travelling and conquering was largely established, through to European capitalism and the advent of Transatlantic slavery. The reasons for the transportation of millions of coolies from India to various plantations across the world are explored while giving detail on the particular circumstances of Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji. A brief review of literature written on the coolie diaspora is given, stressing the differences in scale according to each locality. As a means of bridging and understanding the spaces between coolie communities across the globe, the concept of coolitude is introduced and explained. It provides a route towards a transnational comparative study by highlighting the coolie element in multicultural societies without adhering to any kind of essentialism.

a) Beginnings

'...even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present' ---(Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 2).

Edward Said begins the first chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* with the recognition that the past can never fully exist without the present, and vice versa.

Drawing from T.S. Eliot's proposition that no serious writer is ever separate from a historical sense, from the order of literary tradition, Said suggests that Eliot's notion is not solely an aesthetic one but is applicable to a general understanding of time. Thus he affirms that 'how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present' (2).

To extend this view philosophically, it is arguable that the present does not in fact exist because it is only ever in the past moment that the present can be comprehended. That is we *know* the now in its demise, as it appears in the future, as

the past. For Hegel, time is nothing because the present is always posthumous, the future has not happened and the past has already happened. To ‘un-negate’ Hegel’s time, it is plausible to claim that temporal sections perhaps do exist not wholly and abstractly but concretely and intermingledly. And to *begin* is itself an impossibility as it is a notion that is already dead. Or perhaps as the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris states, there is no entirety in beginnings for each “‘beginning’ comes after an unwritten past that awaits a new language’ (49). But beginnings, especially in the act of writing, are important, and to acknowledge the inseparability of the phases of time, wherein they are capable of shape-shifting, is crucial for the present work.

My study of the literature of the Indian labour diaspora, or as I will be referring to it, the coolie diaspora, in three areas affected by Indian indentureship, Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji, begins with a brief historical overview of the position of Indian indentureship in the course of colonial history. As temporal factions are inseparable, so the points of past events that have given design to future ones, are fundamentally engaged. To understand the impulsion to subjugate coolies is to understand the will to power and the desire for wealth within the context of colonialism which began in a large way, I will argue, in the year 1492 and proceeded to develop colossally right into the 20th century. Perhaps for some, to begin an exploration of 19th century Indian indentureship through another ‘beginning’ which occurred in the 15th century is a disjointed and far-fetched approach. But the potential latent in such a connection is manifested in the very temporal philosophy offered in the preceding paragraphs. What has passed has not in fact passed and what appears to be distant has in fact a pertinent presence.

For the great Martinican poet Edouard Glissant, the relationality of everything is indisputable where all times and places are connected (in Britton, 57). And while

this is indeed a beautiful notion, it of course runs the risk of being vague and general. But what I would like to utilize from this concept of relationality is the capacity for seeing connections in events, people, literary styles, spaces and time periods, for the benefit of an inclusive vision of the world. Thus, what is truly relevant is the possibility of seeing how histories, time-scapes and space-scapes work within a globe of influence, much like the traditional writer in Eliot's formulation. The evolution of the Carib bone-flute in Harris' fiction where it becomes 'the uncanny termination of a bridge of rhythm arching or curving from pre-Columbian Mexico into the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian Guianas in South America' (53) exemplifies this pertinence of tempo-spatial interconnectedness which is further expounded in the ability to feel a less expected global affinity where, Harris writes, 'even as I moved through the gate of stream workers [in London] I knew the rainforests in Brazil and Guyana were under threat, erosion of soils was occurring in the United States and around the globe' (43).

Thus, the purpose and direction of the present work will operate along the lines of such interconnections, whether temporal or spatial, historical or literary. The aim of this study is to understand the coolie predicament in literature, transnationally, through writers who display the strength of seeing the diasporised coolie as a referent among other social and racial referents, in a non-essentialist mode. The writers will represent their respective regions, that is, Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji, all areas affected by Indian indentureship in the 19th century and which have consequently developed Indian communities integral to the makeup of these specific countries. The chosen writers are David Dabydeen from Guyana, K.S.Maniam from Malaysia and Satendra Nandan from Fiji. The comparisons drawn between the literary works will attempt to surpass geographical boundaries, even as they map out a new coolie literary

connection through a sense of a common coolie diaspora, where ‘cartographies of struggle’ (Mohanty, 21) form new diasporic solidarities through postnational intercessions. Thus, the deterritorialisation of the nation-state becomes evident, and the destabilisation of national identity and tellurian boundaries is emphasised in the evolving ‘ethnoscape’, to use Arjun Appadurai’s phrase pertaining to ‘the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals’ (*Theorizing Diaspora*, 25), where diaspora is repositioned postnationally, assuming a Bhabaian liminality and an amoebic countenance. However, necessary nuances affected by territorial limitations manifested in national cultures and politics will inevitably be observed. The cartography involved is of course an aesthetic one that is concerned with dissolving national frontiers in favour of seeing the archetypal line of concerns that plague the state of the diasporised coolie in an acknowledged local setting. The connections also aim to expand the diaspora by attaching the material and metonymic spaces between writers and regions never previously studied within a single context. It also seeks to dispel associations of Indian indentureship primarily as a negotiation of Indian/African components; the racial mobilisation will now include Indian/Malay/Chinese, and Indian/Fijian. The framework through which the works will be linked is a theoretical one (although I will also be giving historical introductions, both generally and specifically). In keeping with the structure and tone of the aims of the present work to interconnect and interweave spaces, places, time and events, the theory that will be used is equally as far-sighted and open to the idea of relationality. ‘Coolitude’, a concept coined by the Indo-Mauritian poet Khal Torabully in 1992, attempts to animate the coolie element in history through memory of the sea voyage across the *kala pani* for the recuperation of the coolie element in the present mosaic

and Baroque¹ nature of societies that are in a continual process of creolization. The theory will be extensively expounded later on in this introduction. The writers, I will argue, embody the essence of coolitude in one form or another which enables an archetypal reading of their texts, and an understanding that their literary visions progress along a common cathartic intention.

But to begin, let us first briefly look back at the history and the foundations of the spirit of colonialism, and trace the connections that have motivated the journey of exploitations and shaped the methods of subjugation practised within the colonial framework which will provide some understanding of the reasons and motivations behind our present concern. Attached to this authoritarian impetus is its paradoxical shadow of the fluidity associated with migrational voyages generated by colonial expansion which have consequently challenged Cartesian assumptions of self, being more akin to the Derridian and Lacanian decentred self, always deferred, always unknowable.

¹ The term 'baroque' here is borrowed from the European Baroque art movement, implying the mixture of various images to produce a piece of art, and in the context of Torabully's usage of the word, 'baroque' refers to the continual fusion of social elements.

b) Colonialism and its impact

i) 1492

The European expansion of colonial power, economic and otherwise, embodied the modern phenomenon of migration. The idea of travel, exploration, adventure and ultimately discovery, importantly marked by the year 1492 fortified for the Europeans, as John Docker propounds in his book *1492: The Poetics of Diaspora*, ‘the idea and assumption that wherever they went in the world that part of the world was theirs by right to own, settle, inhabit, change, convert, transform, work and work over’ (211), instigated a cultural osmosis, a gradual construction of globalisation. As Said rightly notes, the pattern of domination by colonial powers (which itself covered a wide range of empires from the Dutch, Spanish, British and French to the Japanese, Russian and Turkish) was so intense that it in fact ‘laid the groundwork for what is in effect now a fully global world’ (4).

The apparent need to establish nation-states, moulded by a faith in ethnic and cultural homogeneity, plagued the colonist psyche so that imposition of a coerced unity within and without Europe, became imperative. Inextricably linked with this need was the desire to conquer and colonise, and eventually transport and transmute communities from across the globe.

The year 1492, Docker argues, was a rich and crucial year for contemporary history because it signifies the inception of a large colonising impetus through Columbus’ accidental voyage to the West Indies, as well as the beginnings of several diasporas through the expulsion of the Sephardic Jews from Moorish Spain after Sultan Boabdil surrendered Granada and the Alhambra to the Christian forces led by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. Ella Shohat, according to Docker, has

connected the subsequent Spanish Inquisition and Columbus' voyages by the fact that the latter was largely funded by the wealth acquired from the defeated Muslims and Jews. What followed was a conquistadorial continuum of 'expulsions, conversions and killings' (Docker, 2009) both in the Old and New Worlds. Muslims, Jews, indigenous Americans and Black Africans alike were demonised as 'drinkers of blood, cannibals, sorcerers, devils, savages' (2009) that needed to be converted and governed. The conquistadors used the convenience of 'othering' to establish their New World empires. Ultimately, 1492 directed European expansion of power and conquest in their wish to subdue the rest of the world. And even with the decline of the Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch empires in the 1800s, colonialism still flourished with the British entrenching themselves in India, parts of South East Asia, Africa and the West Indies, having gained inspiration from their fellow Europeans. In effect, what prevailed was colonial capitalism, cultural imperialism, mass migrations, continual diasporas, which have shaped the global design of the world today, established as it was, Said continues, by the 'modern empires' (4).

ii) European Capitalism

As nation-states were politically expanding in Europe, during the post-1492 colonising mania, the need to reaffirm and augment the old world was vital to the perpetuation of Empire. Economies desperate for land, cheap labour and raw materials became hugely important for the perpetuation of imperial wealth and the subjugation of those disenfranchised by consumerist greed. And by the end of the 19th century, more than half of the earth's land was governed and utilized by European colonists, primarily the British and the French. Profit became an undeniable priority in the figuring of power, and the attractions of 'spices, sugar, slaves, rubber, cotton,

opium, tin, gold and silver' (Said, 10), became irresistible, as was the desire to explore new territories for exploitation. As the late Prime Minister of Trinidad Eric Williams stated, 'economic considerations reinforced the political, the scientific and the religious urge to discover a new world' (in Ramdin, *Arising from Bondage*, 2).

To maintain focus on colonial capital, devices to stretch the potential of labour were created. One notable strategy of conquest was slavery, which although a prehistoric notion practised in the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, India and China, gained especial significance in the agricultural and later industrial organisation of labour, initiated by the Portuguese in as early as 1444. Thus with the growing need for labour and the coastal exploration of Africa, the Spanish, French, Dutch and British soon capitalised on the viability of African slavery for economic growth. Slavery in the New World became an ugly feature in the history of European colonisation, and it was precisely the onset of European capitalism, Walter Rodney tells us, which 'set slavery and the African Slave Trade in motion' (in Ramdin, *Arising from Bondage*, 4).

But the system of slavery, Hugh Tinker argues, was not economically viable. To begin with, the investment by the shipper in his slaves was a venture because 'even at their cheapest, the slaves cost the purchaser on the west coast of Africa a considerable sum after they had already passed through several hands and realized several kinds of profit' (4). Furthermore, the value of a slave depended on whether he was alive upon arrival. 'A dead slave,' Tinker affirms, 'was a dead loss'(4). With this knowledge in mind, the ill-treatment of slaves aboard the slave ships which resulted in a high mortality rate becomes and remains a conundrum and the living conditions and mis-management of the slaves on the sugar plantations which were dire to the extent that 'between one-quarter and one-third of the new arrivals died in their first years'(5)

poses the crucial question: Was slavery a mode of expanding European capitalism or an institution exerting authority and subjugation, an ornamental manifestation of desire, cruelty and power? Perhaps it is true to claim that it was a materialisation of both. On the one hand, it was economically abortive, as Adam Smith claims in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*: ‘the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any. A person who can acquire no property can have no other interest than to rest as much, and to labour as little as possible’ (365), where torture and punishment prevail as the ‘joys’ of enslavement and domination. On the other, the discovery of the New World allowed for the ownership of tropical land and consequently the birth of a new unit of production, i.e., the plantation. For it was Columbus, on his second voyage to the West Indies, who introduced the sugar cane plant, which ultimately resulted in the ubiquity of sugar and its implications in Caribbean society. Along with this came the need for a plantation work force which began with the indigenous population in the Caribbean and in the southern United States but this was soon exhausted, and continued with the African slaves as industrial agriculture expanded. The subsequent Industrial Revolution further fortified the need for an extensive work force, as the distribution of tropical products stretched to encompass the mass of the European population. Thus, even with the demise of slavery in the early to mid 19th century, the legacy of slavery, Tinker propounds, remained looming on plantation society, because cheap labour in the forms of servitude akin to slavery was needed to maintain the production level of the plantations for the preservation of European consumerism in the age of burgeoning consumption.

It follows that even as the agitations against the slave trade were made evident as early as the 17th century by the American Quakers and Methodists, later on by the

Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787-1806) led by their main spokesmen William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp, The Anti-Slavery Society (1823-1839) headed by Thomas Fowell Buxton, and of course by the numerous slave revolts, the horrors of slavery did not deter the aspiration for more exploitation of labour. Thus, when Apprenticeship, ‘a form of labour control to assist the planters in the transition from slavery to the employment of free labour’ (Ramdin, *Arising from Bondage*, 6), ended in 1838, another device for the perpetuation of the plantation economy, primarily the sugar plantations, in the colonies mainly in the West Indies, South Africa and Mauritius, was being created: East Indian indentureship.

iii) Global Coolie Indentureship

‘They came in ships/From far across the seas...Some came with dreams/ Of milk and honey riches./Others came, fleeing famine/And death,/Alike, they came...All alike,/Crossing dark waters’---(Mahadai Das, “They Came in Ships”, 289).

Indenture, Tinker states, ‘provided a solution to the problem of maintaining an adequate supply of cheap labour’ (21). It was with this general idea of the expansion of capital and the perpetuation of plantation production that almost 2 million coolies from the vast population of an India plagued by famine, floods, poverty and colonial exploitation were indentured and shipped to various colonies across the globe. Several methods of recruitment were used: deception, kidnapping and promises of wealth. The context within which the poor in India survived has to be explicated in order to ascertain how indentureship provided hope to many.

The *Begar* system in India which required workers to give their labour to the

state meant they were tied to a rural economy that depended on the permanent contribution of the workers. But because such an economy was never entirely stable, peasant farmers were losing their lands which induced their departure to the towns to seek casual employment. Furthermore, as Ramdin suggests, the poor of India were trapped in their state of penury partly as ‘a result of British economic policies in India, such as the land revenue policies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which resulted in the unemployment of millions of Indians’ (*Arising from Bondage*, 11). Thus, the growing number of drifting workers and unemployed Indians in desperate need of an income served the purposes of indenture, where the luring tales fabricated by the recruiter of the attractions of faraway ‘milk-and-honey’ lands teeming with utopian possibilities, served to tempt the indigent Indians into signing contracts that would seal their fate as coolies. As Dabydeen writes in *The Counting House* of the way in which fables intertwined with Hindu myth were related to encourage the despondent to pawn themselves in the colonial game of narcissistic abuse and manipulation: ‘ “ Guiana is the very land of Ramayana. Ramayana set in long-time-ago place, and the whitepeople them now plough it, and they call it Guiana. And it have so much gold there that you don’t have enough hand and neck and foot to wear bangle”’(4).

Moreover, disasters like floods and famine instigated the desire to search for a means of survival elsewhere. ‘Early emigrants,’ Tinker writes, ‘were stimulated into going overseas because of the famine in the Upper India in the 1840s’ (57).

Furthermore, as Dale Bisnauth writes in his book *The Settlement of Indians in Guyana 1890-1930*, famine struck numerous areas of India, notably in the North-Western Provinces in 1860-1, Bihar and Orissa in 1865-66 and, he asserts, ‘[the] great food scarcity in Oudh and the eastern districts of Agra in 1873-74, and again in 1874-

75, saw 24,571 people leave in the first period, and 10,109 in the second' (37). Thus, in desperation, many compromised the Hindu ban explicated in the *Shastras* against crossing the *kala pani*² and sought their putative fortunes overseas.

Recent critics have offered divergent views on the modes of recruitment. The revisionist historian Brij Lal has disputed the theme of kidnap often associated with Indian indentureship. He writes that 'the recruiters and *arkatis* did not play the major role that is normally ascribed to them in inducing Indian peasants to migrate' ("Fiji's Girmityas", 28). Contrastingly, Brinsley Samaroo suggests that recruiting methods heavily involved deception and kidnapping ("Two Abolitions: African Slavery and East Indian Indentureship"). D. Northrup detaches the distinction between those recruited by deception and those who volunteered (*Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism*). A more balanced view comes from Madhavi Kale in *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery and Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* who suggests that indenture comprised a combination of victims and opportunists. But for whatever reason the labourers were compelled to leave, the crucial point is that they left, braving the sea voyage across the Atlantic, Indian or the South Pacific oceans, in ships with names like *Whitby*, *Hesperus*, *Salsette* and *Leonidas*, where they lived, died, suffered, and formed new bonds of ship comradeship, *jahaji bhai*, a link of coolieness that surpassed blood, class, caste, enjoined as the coolies were by their mutual predicament of displacement.

The coolies who were indentured to the Caribbean³ were mainly from North

2 Kala pani, which literally means 'dark waters', refers to the crossing of the seas by Hindus which was banned because this was believed to result in the loss of one's caste.

3 The most important importers of Indian labour were Guyana and Trinidad. Other colonies that imported on a smaller scale were Martinique, Guadeloupe, Surinam, Jamaica, Cuba, St. Kitts, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. (Bisnauth).

India. The foremost labourers involved in the system were the semi-aboriginal Hill Coolies, or the Dhangars as they are otherwise known, from the Chota Nagpur region in Northern India. They were seen as the ideal recruits because of their lack of religious ties (they were not Hindus) and were therefore more open to change. But they subsequently became involved in the tea plantations in India and sources of labour were sought elsewhere, primarily in the Gangetic plains concentrated in areas like the United Provinces, Oudh, Orissa and Bihar. The first venture of acquiring indentured labour for the Caribbean was performed by John Gladstone in 1836. He asked Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. for 100 coolies to be sent to his sugar plantations in Guyana, and two years later, in 1838, the *Whitby* and the *Hesperus* carried the first coolies to Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo in British Guiana. Subsequently 239,149 Indians were shipped to Guyana, or British Guiana as it was known then, between the year of indentureship's inception and 1917, the year of its abolition. Most of the Indians who left were either agriculturalists or low-castes. Bisnauth records the agriculturalists as 'Malis, Kachhis and Kunbis' (46) and the low-castes as 'Doms (scavengers), Bhangis (sweepers), Dhobis (washermen) and Chamars (curriers)' (47). Because the largest caste group to immigrate to Guyana were the Chamars, Bisnauth refers to the degradation of the Guyanese coolie as a kind of 'Chamarisation', antithetical to 'Sanskritisation'.

Upon arrival, they were taken to the Immigration Depot in Georgetown and then distributed to various estates where their five-year contracts were activated. Conditions on the plantations were severe. Several witnesses testified to the abuse received by coolies on Gladstone's *Vreed-en-Hoop* plantation. One of them, Elizabeth Caesar, noted: 'The Coolies were locked up in the sick house, and the next morning they were flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails; the manager was in the house, and they

flogged the people under his house; they were tied to the post of the gallery of the manager's house; I cannot tell how many licks; he gave them enough; I saw blood. When they were flogged at manager's house, they rubbed salt pickle on their backs' (Scoble, 16). Furthermore, difficulties arose within the Indian communities themselves where the sex-ratio disparity contributed to a generation of violence by men towards the few women who had left their *janmabhumi* (motherland) and upon arrival were sought after both by Indian men and the White overseers. Moses Seenarine details the female:male ratio in British Guiana as follows: 11:100 in 1851, 33:100 in 1869 and 40:100 in 1914 (*Recasting Indian Women*).

The women who did leave often did so on their own account, being mostly widows, prostitutes, abandoned or single women. Rhoda Reddock maintains that, antithetical to the common view of the 'docile and compliant Indian woman', the *kala pani* women came to the Caribbean 'as individual women' (81). Jealousy led to frequent wife-murders, and despite the supposed autonomy enjoyed by coolie women in Guyana apparently due to their scarcity, women were often subjects of a dual Indian and European patriarchy. Jeremy Poynting has pointed out that women endured beatings and death at the hands of men, but this fact should not obliterate the re-evaluation of their roles as Indian women overseas, which leaned towards a creative appropriation of independence and authority. Poynting cites the words of a somewhat liberated Indian woman in Trinidad in the 1870s: ' " When the last ship came in I took a Papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once" ' (233).

Parallels have been drawn between slavery and indentureship, pioneered by Tinker in his book *A New System of Slavery* and propagated by Caribbean writers like George Lamming, Frank Birbalsingh who referred to indentureship as 'slavery's

bedfellow' (*Indenture & Exile*), Brinsley Samaroo and Edouard Glissant. But even prior to the scholarisation of Indian indentureship, observers of the system during its implementation, had commented on the camouflaging of slavery through a façade of 'acceptable labour'. Chief Justice of British Guiana, J. Beaumont, described indentureship as 'a monstrous rotten system, rooted upon slavery, grown in its stale soil, emulating its worst abuses and only the more dangerous because it presented itself under false colours, where slavery had the brand of infamy written upon its forehead' (in Sandhu, 76). The similar conditions of subjugation and hardship endured by both victims of oppression within the sugar plantations were so compelling that it was effortless to view the two as fundamentally interconnected. Thus it was only natural for the former Guyanese President Cheddi Jagan to state that 'Indentureship was slavery in another guise' where the slaves and coolies 'watered the sugar cane with their blood' (13).

However, the conception of Indian indentureship as 'another form of slavery' is not a unanimous one. Marina Carter in her book *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire* dispels the analogy altogether, preferring instead a correlation between Indian labour migration of the 19th century and European migration to the New Worlds which was occurring around the same time. She writes that the migration of coolies was often 'free' and that methods of coercion used during African slavery were not substantial enough during indentureship to correspond. Moreover, the Indians, unlike the Africans, but similar to the Europeans, were never wholly natally severed, where 'Indian migrants whose terms of service, although often extended, were legally finite and returned home in large numbers' (2-3). Letters home were also a significant source of maintaining connections with 'family, kin and nation' (2) and again this feature of coolie

migration reflects that of its putative European doppelganger: 'In both European and Indian migration, letters home were an important source of knowledge about the overseas colonies'(3).

But one has to be wary of such a euphemistic approach to the question of coolie labour because the crucial factor is that coolies were *not free* especially since they could not negotiate the terms of their contract. Samaroo asserts that criminal laws were enforced to control Indians and suicide, murder, riots and strikes were active forms of resistance used both by coolies and slaves. Even after the expiry of their contracts, the coolies were still bound at least in monetary terms. Those who desired to return to India faced problems of finding resources for the return fare and if they could they were enticed into receiving land within the boundaries of the plantations, or if they wanted a free return passage they had to work another five years as free labourers. A voice from the past, Moolian, articulates these sentiments: 'india coming dey/ e mark/ five year done/ e want go india/ have to pay one passage/ if ten year done/ free it dey/ go/ dat time gi paper/ some people buss paper an trow way/ some people want to change it shop buy something/ plenty a dem wipe de backside/ ship no coming/ ship no going' (in *The Still Cry*, ed. Mahabir, 73). As Lommarsh Roopnarine states, time-expired workers had three options: reindenture, return to India and independent farming. The first option bound the coolie once more and was induced mainly because of increasing debts acquired during indentureship, the second was problematic because most coolies did not have enough money to pay for their return fare⁴ and those who did faced challenges at home such as 'caste rules, cleansing

⁴ The return fare in the early years of indentureship was paid for by the employer, but in 1851 the policy of giving land instead of the return passage was implemented in Trinidad and soon followed in the other colonies. This strategy did not favour the Indians because the land given was often of poor quality and the drive behind the

through feasting the village Brahmin (money spent), the changes they went through in terms of language, attitude, diet, physical features, made them misfits in their society' (Roopnarine, 12). The last option was not open before 1870 and the land used for farming was often unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, it offered Indians the opportunity to be somewhat financially autonomous.

The similarities between slavery and indentureship seem too crucial to be discarded. And while it is important to draw distinctions as Carter and the French Caribbean historian Singaravelou⁵ have done, they should be seen as informed and careful studies of nuances, veering towards a technical assimilation of facts. For what is notable about the parallelisation of the two tragedies of human history is a solidarity of plights and a recognition that suffering and hardship form the basis of their relationship. It is useful here to contemplate George Lamming's proposition that the culture of labour in the Caribbean (and of course in other post-slavery and post-indenture societies) is one shared by both Africans and Asians: 'the original experience of Africans and Asians in the Caribbean is the experience of a controlled and violent alienation from the produce of their labour; alienation from the meaning and purpose of human labour' (53). It is thus the common dehumanisation of slaves

gesture was a controlling one. Brinsley Samaroo details the methods of subjugation practised by the planters: 1) Keeping the labourers close to the plantation (this includes indentured and time-expired workers where the former's movements were restricted; passes were given to labourers and they could not venture beyond a 2-mile radius without one. In the case of the latter, the land given to them to cultivate was often within the precinct of the plantation and therefore they were not only locationally trapped, but were sometimes used as extra labour on the plantations when needed). 2) Building schools and churches and thus controlling the type of education given to Indians. 3) Giving them only rice lands and no other types of land to cultivate. (**India in the Caribbean**).

⁵ Singaravelou's argument runs along almost the same lines as Carter's. He disassociates coolie recruitment with the idea of coercion and stresses that the main distinction to be drawn between slavery and indentureship is *willingness*. (translation from Bragard, Chapter 1).

and coolies and the alienation of their labour that conjoin them and their fates. Their experiences of trauma on the ships and on the plantations unite them further. Tinker states that Europeans involved in the coolie voyages continually made comparisons with the Middle Passage. Slaves and coolies were, as Samaroo affirms, bound by a fear 'of the unknown' (25). Furthermore, the coolies arrived to directly replace slave labour and lived in the same 'nigger yards' which once housed the slaves. The living conditions remained appalling. Special magistrate in Mauritius, Charles Anderson, commented on the coolie predicament: 'with a few exceptions they are treated with great and unjust severity, by overwork and by personal chastisement; their lodging accommodation is either too confined and disgustingly filthy, or none is provided for them; and in cases of sickness [there is] the most culpable neglect' (in Tinker, 69). Such treatment is perhaps not shocking especially in consideration of the reasons behind coolie recruitment. South African writer Agnes Sam accurately describes the logic of abuse: 'it is hard to imagine illiterate Indian peasants arriving on the scene and being treated differently from slaves by the very plantation owners who were disgruntled at losing their slave property' (4). The differences between slavery and indentureship should of course be acknowledged but not at the risk of disassociating the obvious similarities shared by them. For such a disassociation creates an illusory historical gap between communities that need more collaboration in contemporary society.

But Indian indentureship, which was mainly a British monopoly, was not merely a strategy of slave replacement, for as the British Empire stretched its economic powers, the temptation of introducing indentureship to its colonies outside of the framework of slave plantations was magnetic. Thus, countries like Malaya and Fiji were equally as involved in the recruitment of assisted labour from India, in their

cases, mostly from South India especially from areas such as Madras and Nagapatam in the districts of North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Chingleput, Tanjore, Trichy and Ramnad. Although African slave labour was experimented with in a small way in Malaya in the 1780s, it never took off as it did in the West Indies and the United States, mainly because it was late in reaching the Malay peninsula, and calls for abolition in British territories were already being made by the end of the 18th century. Although Indian indentureship was only officialised in Malaya in 1872, the recruitment of indentured labour had already begun in as early as 1787 when Francis Light landed on Penang island. He requested for a 'supply of one hundred coolies, as the price of labour in Penang was enormous' (Sandhu, 47). Nothing substantial flourished from this request. Kernial Singh Sandhu argues in his book *Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement 1786-1957* that the actual year of the inception of Indian indentureship in Malaya is unclear for there is evidence that it was flirted with in 1787, experimented with in 1823 and then again in 1844 when 97 coolies were brought from Calcutta to work on the sugar plantations in Malaya. And there is no way of knowing how many indentured labourers entered the country from the commencement of the system to its abolition in 1910. Statistical data, Sandhu states, are available only from 1866 onwards.

Most of the coolies who were brought into Malaya were Untouchables, or Ad-
 dravidas whose social position in India resembled that of a slave or at best a serf. In his book *Indians in Malaya and Singapore*, Sinnappah Arasaratnam lists the low-castes involved in the migration from South India to Malaya: '*paraiyan, chakkiliyan, pallan*' (26). But amongst those who left were also land-owning cultivators from high-medium castes such as *vellan, koundan* and *vanniyan*, who were coerced into leaving, Arasaratnam writes, most possibly because their land was reaching its

saturation point. As with the North Indians who left for the Caribbean, reasons for leaving were many and diverse for the South Indians, each seeking fulfilment abroad which never came. There was, like British Guiana, a sex-ratio disparity in the Malayan system of indenture. This problem however was gradually solved through the post-indentureship scheme of labour recruitment.

After the abolition of indentureship in 1910, another 'parallel system of labour recruitment evolved for Malaya' (Arasaratnam, 16) called the *kangany* system. Supposedly a 'free' labour recruitment scheme, its inception probably pre-dates 1910, being as early as the 1860s. The system did not fully take off, however, until the 1880s when the cultivation of coffee expanded and later became an important source of labour in the early 1900s when the 'rubber boom' was in full force. The *kangany* was a recruiter employed by his employer planter to return to India and recruit family, friends and acquaintances from his own village. He was given money for expenses and would provide food, clothing and transportation for his recruits. The *kangany* was also a labourer, but one who had a significant amount of power and influence amongst the other labourers, and was seen as 'the all-important link between the planter and his labour force' (Sandhu, 90-1). Exploitation was not exempt from the structure of this recruiting system. While it professed only to ship 'free' labourers, the methods of recruiting were similar to those used during indentureship, wherein the freedom of the recruit was often compromised. Bribery, deception, kidnapping and promises of prosperity were often used by the *kangany* to inveigle labourers into migrating to Malaya. Not unlike the *arkati* in the indentureship system who used his local knowledge to manipulate villagers into leaving their homes for 'better' prospects, the *kangany* perceptively utilized the negative circumstances of the village to weave his tales of a Malayan El Dorado. An article published in the Calcuttan nationalist

newspaper, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, in 1913 explicates the insidiousness of the *kangany*:

The recruiting Kanganies...who do not care for the welfare of the coolies as long as they get a good commission from their employers give a glowing description of the new country...The Kanganies are easily believed by the simpletons because he...shines like a tin-god clothed in gorgeous velvet coat...The advertisement of the Federated Malay States Government...gives all that are best here; the race courses which may not be seen by the coolie at all, the Mariamman temple within the radius of 50 miles the coolie may not even tread...the conditions under which the coolies to be recruited are not properly explained to them and in the majority of cases, the emigration does not even see the coolies until they are ready to be packed away (in Sandhu, 101).

Thus, the coolie was never presented with the full picture of his employment. He embarked on a voyage across the sea with full faith in his future, only to be gravely disappointed by the gross misrepresentation of the conditions in Malaya. The wages, for example, for a male coolie was seven annas a day but the cost of living was two and a half times higher than it was in India. Furthermore, the freedom of the *kangany*- recruited labourer was a myth. The same Calcuttan article states: 'According to the enactment of the States there are no statutory (indentured) emigrants. Everyone is a free coolie. He can leave the estate by giving a month's notice to the employer. It is all in theory. A coolie's notice is not generally accepted by the manager. In 99 out of 100 cases, no coolie is allowed to see and speak to the manager. The coolie should give notice to the manager through the Kangany who, if he discharged a coolie from the estate, would lose two cents a day...naturally the Kangany informs the coolies that there (sic) indenture is not terminated' (101). Thus while indentureship was accused of being slavery in another guise, the *kangany*

system could be indicted for being a masked form of indentureship.

Emigration to Fiji became a significant feature only in the 20th century. It was offset by the need for workers on the sugarcane plantations which were monopolised by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. The search for coolies was concentrated, like Malaya, on the South of India. Madras and Nagapatam were ports used for Malaya as well as Fiji, but the demand in Malaya was so intense that coolies for Fiji had to be found outside of the Madras Presidency. The first shipment of coolies occurred in 1879 on the *Leonidas* where 32 coolies died due to cholera, smallpox and dysentery which plagued the ship. The next shipment for Fiji transpired only in 1882. Between then and 1919, 87 shiploads of coolies were sent to Fiji. The following years of indentureship saw dire working and living conditions, and severe racial tensions between the Australian overseers and their coolie labourers. This compelled the Christian missionary C.F. Andrews to probe into the situation of the coolies in Fiji. Together with W.W. Pearson, Andrews published *Indian Labour in Fiji; an independent inquiry* in which they wrote that the coolie lines were ‘far worse than anything we had ever seen before...[they were] more like stables than human dwellings’ (17). Furthermore, the wages received by the labourers contrasted sharply with the high cost of living. The disparity in wages between Fiji and the West Indies was noted by James McNeill and he reported that the cruel management of the coolies in Fiji was particularly bad: ‘there are still too many cases of assault proved against overseers and headmen’ (in Sandhu, 328).

The coolies in Fiji were uniquely referred to as ‘*girmits*’ which finds its roots in the distortion of the word ‘agreement’. The agreement signified the terms of the coolie’s employment and therefore marked him/her as nothing more than an object of labour which dehumanised and defaced the coolie. Women and men alike left their

motherland for a 'better life' as promised by the *arkati*. But the number of women who left was significantly lower than the men, mainly because the 'right type of woman' was shielded from crossing the *kala pani*. Thus, the sex-ratio disparity faced by the West Indian colonies was apparent in Fiji as well and contributed significantly to the life of the community. Brij Lal notes that the shortage of women led to polyandry which became 'a major source of tension in the lines' (*Bittersweet*, 13) and eventually resulted in a considerable number of suicides and acts of violence. 'Women,' Lal states, 'were blamed for murders and suicides on the plantations and sometimes even for the high infant mortality rates' (*Bittersweet*, 14). When indentureship was abolished in Fiji in 1920 a large Indian community had already developed. Many were working on land leased from Fijians around the sugar mills and therefore built a cohesive agricultural society, which because of colonial policy remained isolated from the Fijians.

The coolies in Guyana, Malaysia, Fiji and indeed all the other colonies involved in coolie indentureship, faced similar fates, albeit with differences peculiar to their respective plantations which resulted in region-specific rules, managerial hierarchies and so on. But the fact of the matter is that the coolies, wherever they went, were transplanted, severed as it were from the mutual 'mother', facing Kristeva's abjection and exilic pain, exemplified in the words of a Trinidadian coolie, Bharath: 'e no tell e/ no come back/ e no come back/ e no come back/ e no come back/ e no greet mumma fadder again/ gwine kalapani' (*The Still Cry*, ed. Mahabir, 95). The anguish of displacement, or misplacement as Ramabai Espinet puts it, would substantially contribute to their common quest for identity, cultural acceptance and political visibility.

c) *Representations of Indians in the Caribbean⁶, Malaysia and Fiji*

*'Long stigmatised from the fact of having taken over the reins from slavery, and of having thus been complicit, albeit involuntarily, in the perpetuation of a colonial form of society after the abolition of slavery, the Indian immigrant has been at one and the same time a despised foreigner and fundamentally excluded. The Négritude era ignored the Indian who was the coolie, socially non-existent...fundamentally on the margins'---(Jean Benoist, *Hindouismes Creoles. Mascareignes, Antilles*. Translation taken from *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*, 12).*

French anthropologist Jean Benoist accurately describes the tattoo of the coolie diaspora: the maculation of accusation, the guilt of appropriation, the cultural isolation. The reference to the position of the Indian immigrant amidst a society attempting to recuperate from the shackles of slavery, is an apposite and familiar idea, one that intertwines the fact of slavery with that of indenture. Lamming, in citing the Caribbean predicament, stresses, as already observed in a previous section of this introduction, the impossibility of disconnecting the forces of labour that have shaped the region's modern nations. The culture of labour, as he regards it, is what forms the common site of experience and solidarity between the Africans and the Indians. 'The most authentic meaning of the word "Caribbean"', he states, 'is the organization of labour within the region by people particularly from Asia and Africa' (3). But with that notion denied, the danger of racialising national identity persists, where the neglect of an inclusive history of labour, shaped as it was by a common colonial force of subjugation and degradation, results in a monofocal representation of multicultural societies.

The virtual absence or the stereotypical portrayal of Indians in Caribbean

⁶ The reason for focusing in this section of the introduction on the Caribbean at large rather than just Guyana is to see Guyana as part of the Caribbean which then illuminates the way in which the mis- and under-representation of Indians in literature is not just specific to one section of the region's community but encompasses the wider spectrum of representations.

fiction comments on the state of the coolie element in an Afrocentrist Caribbean society. It becomes a glaring problem especially since such under-representations reflect the state of a racially hegemonic society in places like Guyana and Trinidad where Indians form either a majority or a significant minority. But the encouraging escalation of Indo-Caribbean fiction, history and critical work, which is also beginning to encompass the issue of coolie women comments on the necessary interest in establishing Indians in the history and contemporary milieu of Caribbean life⁷. Furthermore, the inception of Peepal Tree Press by Poynting in 1985 has encouraged more publications by and about the Indo-Caribbean journey. Writers such as David Dabydeen, Cyril Dabydeen, V.S. and Shiva Naipaul, Lakshmi Persaud, Ramabai Espinet, Marina Budhos, Sasenarine Persaud, Shani Mootoo, Leelawatee Manoo-Rahming, Rooplall Monar and Mahadai Das have indeed contributed to the standard and integrity of Indo-Caribbean writing.

The same cannot be applied to the state of Indians in Malaysia and Fiji, where the growth of critical and especially fictional work on the Indian communities has not flourished in the way that it has in the Caribbean. Work, nonetheless, has been and is being produced in these areas, but not with the same fierceness and fortitude as in the Caribbean. Vijay Mishra (notably *Rama's Banishment: A centenary tribute to the Fiji Indians*), Brij Lal (*Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji* and *Crossing the Kala Pani*) and Satendra Nandan (notably *Paradise in Pieces*) from Fiji have sought to document the history of Indian indentureship through a new light,

⁷ Examples of this include Véronique Bragard's *Voyages into Coolitude: Kala Pani Women's Cross-Cultural Creative Memory* (forthcoming), Jeremy Poynting's *The Second Shipwreck* (forthcoming), Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic Dislocations*, Noor Kumar Mahabir's *The Still Cry: Personal Accounts of East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago* and *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (eds. V. Shepard, B. Brereton and B. Bailey).

countering the colonial representations of Fijian-Indians. K.L. Gillion's Fiji's *Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* published in 1962 is of course an invaluable 'classic' in the study of Indo-Fijian history as is the account of the ex-indentured labourer Totaram Sanadhya, *My twenty-one years in the Fiji Islands*. The recent publication of *Bittersweet* edited by Lal which is an anthology of essays, poems, short stories and memoirs on the nature and meaning of the Indo-Fijian experience attests to the growing body of literature concerning the Indian community in Fiji. This does not mean that creative work by Indian-Fijians is flourishing, merely that it is developing. Satendra Nandan, however, is a significant figure in the Indo-Fijian literary scene and has dealt with the question of migration and politics with keenness and poignancy. Interestingly, there have been writers who have chosen to write about the Indo-Fijian experience in Fiji-Hindi, for instance, Subramani and Raymond Pillay. Much work has been done on the coups in Fiji, which inevitably considers the political and cultural conditions of the Indian-Fijians. *Treason at Ten* by Kenneth Bain, *Ethnic Conflict and Development: The Case of Fiji* by Ralph R. Premdas, *Politics in Fiji: Studies in Contemporary History* and *Power and Prejudice: The Making of the Fiji Crisis* by Brij Lal are but some examples of the scholarship on the Fijian coups. In Malaysia, work on the history of Indo-Malaysians has been mainly colonial ventures or are now regarded as 'classics'. Early works include M.N.Nayar's *Indians in Malaya* (1937), George Netto's *Indians in Malaya* (1961) and R.N.Jackson's *Immigrant Labour and the development of Malaya* (1961). A thorough and comprehensive study of the settlement of Indians in Malaya has been done by Kernial Singh Sandhu called *Indians in Malaya; Some aspects of their immigration and settlement (1786-1957)*. Another equally as informative, albeit significantly shorter in length, study of Indian immigration is Sinnapah Arasaratnam's *Indians in*

Malaya and Singapore. R.K. Jain has written on the coolies on the Malayan plantations in *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, and a crucial scholar in the field of Indo-Malaysian studies (if there is such a thing) is Rajakrishnan Ramaswamy who has written about the subalternised Indians and the issues of caste that have transformed and persisted within the community. In respect to literature written by or about Indians in Malaysia, the situation appears to be static.

K.S.Maniam seems to be the only Indo-Malaysian writer of integrity who has shown a keen dedication to highlighting the history and present circumstances of Tamil Indians within the social and cultural structures of a rapidly developing Malaysia. Thus the Raja Rao Award for Literature which he received in 2000 for his contribution to the South Asian diaspora was far from unexpected. Another credible writer is the poet Cecil Rajendra, whose work is mainly centred on political and environmental issues. His dealings with the Indo-Malaysian situation are peripheral.

Lloyd Fernando whose two novels *The Scorpion Orchid* and *Green is the Colour* have tackled quite passionately the topic of Malaysian multiculturalism is another important figure on the Malaysian literary scene. A distinction should be drawn between Indians writing in English and those writing in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. Uthaya Sankar and a host of other Indian writers have chosen to express themselves in the national language, both for literary recognition and a medium of connecting the Indian element with the wider society. Maniam and Rajendra, and indeed all the other Malaysian writers writing in English, have battled hard to be included in the sphere of national literature which is linguistically confined to Bahasa Malaysia. Such marginalisation has undoubtedly affected the growth of literature in English in Malaysia, where encouragement is virtually absent. Nonetheless Maniam's work deserves due recognition and study. A significant recent contribution to the

representation of Indians in the rubber plantations is Deepak Kumaran Menon's film *Chemman Chaali* or *The Gravel Road*, which presents the daily life of rubber-tappers and the role of education in presenting an opportunity for social mobilisation.

The development of coolie voices is still young and is at the stage of assertion and negotiation. The 'coolie' then needs to be professed, through memory, diasporic rethinking, repositioning and re-presenting, which will generate new spaces of place and new directions of voice. The concept of coolitude provides such an avenue, steeped as it is with a diasporic mentality that seeks to accommodate the imaginative scope of the coolie as a part of a global whole.

d) Coolitude

i) The context and concept of Coolitude

'Coolie because my lost memory chooses its roots in my veracity...at the threshold of vowels and consonants I knock at meanings differently. For I love words before all, even before my wounds'---(Khal Torabully, *Cale d'Etoiles Coolitude*⁸, 220).

Khal Torabully's concept of coolitude begins with the recuperation of the term 'coolie'. Its negative connotations have served, both then and now, to define

⁸ All quotations from *Cale D'Etoiles*, as well as quotations by Torabully and the concept of coolitude are taken from Marina Carter and Khal Torabully's *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*.

Indians and their descendents through the degradation of their past, the humiliation of their servitude. The retrieval of the word 'coolie' is vital precisely because of its dark history. Indo-Guyanese poet Rajkumari Singh in her prose piece "I am a Coolie" (*They Came in Ships*) compels a more informed, sensitive and intuitive grasp of the word's connotations: 'COOLIE. Think of the word...Does it not make you aware of the hardships and trials- mental and physical- that our grandfathers and grandmothers experienced? Does it not remind you that they were brought from their far-off Motherland to save ours from total economic collapse? Did not these Coolies plant sugarcane, fields and fields of swaying sugarcane to give the taste of sweetness to us all and to all sorts of people all over the world?' (86-7). Thus she concludes that the word needs to be affirmed, celebrated, repossessed for it is 'a beautiful word that conjured up poignancy, tears, defeats, achievements' (87). Consequently, she finds it necessary to proclaim her coolie identity: 'I AM A COOLIE' (87). The word becomes a representation, a poignant metonym for strife, a semiotic site for the experimentation of identity and honour. But a necessary warning has to accompany such jubilation and exultation. While it is certainly crucial to profess the past and to grace its more reductive implications, the proclamation of identity, especially one which is bound to an historical phenomenon, has to be a facet of a process that is free from what I have termed as a 'fossilisation of the recuperative'. It cannot afford to *remain* celebratory because this very inertia signals its inability to be contemporary and therefore relevant to the topicality of politics, culture and society at large.

Coolitude, as will later be demonstrated, manages to overcome the danger in fossilising the coolieness of the coolie through its self-conscious dialectics which runs against the vein of Jean Paul Sartre's formulation of the 'anti-racist racism' of Négritude that professed the masochism of the movement and its inevitable self-

negation, using the Hegelian mode of the dialectics of duration. Négritude, Sartre wrote, will cancel itself out once its duties have expired, once Blackness has been reclaimed. But the notion of Négritude's self-destruction is apt, especially with the gift of retrospection. Coolitude demonstrates this dialectics of duration in its concept of 'highlighting', which as will later be evident, brings to the forefront various elements at various times. Thus, there is always movement, a mobilisation of efforts, an indefinite texture of relationality, paste-like, in between matter and liquid, existing in an edgeless duration, non-polemically, as in the case of the French thinker Gaston Bachelard's notion of 'sticky space-time' wherein water and earth, combine to form 'a penetrating substance, of touching of the inward parts of substance, and coming to know what lies within the seed, conquering the earth from within, just as water conquers earth' (in Mary Jones, 105)⁹. Thus, duration, space and matter are all unfixed in a continual journey whose time is akin to that of a reverie where there is expansion and openness. Coolitude, then, can never self-negate for it is too conscious of the implications of racial fundamentalism and the fossilization of history. Even as it proclaims 'COOLIE', it is aware of the death of the coolie once another element requires recuperation. What it does provide for is the encompassing of other elements, like the coolie, to subsist within the ethics of coolitude, simultaneously, as each waits its turn for the coming 'spot-light'.

Brinda Mehta's claim that coolitude lacks historical and political agency is based on a closed and inaccurate comprehension of the theory's motivations and aims. Her twinning of Négritude and coolitude foundationalises this erroneousness where she imagines coolitude *merely* as an 'Indianized version of Négritude' thereby discrediting the uniqueness and autonomy of the concept, which intends to rid itself of

⁹ All future quotations from Bachelard will be taken from this source.

such misleading associations. When she states that coolitude's distance from ethnic affirmation which supposedly manifests as a result of its wider view of *metissage*, places it (unlike Négritude) as a 'negation of the temporality of political agency' (56), she fails to consider the *meaning* of coolitude as a consciously accommodating aesthetic, which must *prioritise* but not *exclusivise* the coolie at the expense of obscuring other existing elements that have *contributed* to the makeup of the coolie, and this very willingness to view 'coolienness' as part and parcel of a societal mosaic which already encompasses the social, cultural and political suggests its *immediacy* in the scope of temporality. Coolitude, thus, does not desire essentialism because it is aware of the innumerable 'black spots' that surface as a consequence, and Mehta's claim that coolitude is a 'displaced imaginary construction of nostalgia' (56) that is unable to assert political self-control is firstly untrue because the concept has already been used in the Mauritian political context, and secondly, is dangerous in its call for 'ethnicity' as a means of political justification. Moreover the potential in coolitude to activate political justice is immense and refreshing in that it offers new non-racialised paradigms of mutuality which become especially crucial in situations like the Fijian one where military aggression has been used to perpetuate colonialist divide-and-rule strategies and the subjugation of Indians.

Similarly, the term 'nigger' has equally as harsh implications of denigration and insult. Indo-Guyanese writer Arnold Itwaru explicates the common degradation associated with both nomenclatures in his novella *Shanti*: '...the people, his people, cursed with the name coolie, the name nigger...insecure, afraid, humble even in their suffering' (92). The convalescence of the word 'nègre' was performed by the Négritude movement, founded by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Gontran Damas in the 1930s. And while coolitude has certain obvious associations

with Négritude (the most explicit being etymological although by no means the foremost one) it largely diverges from the latter in terms of its outlook which is more pluralistically accommodating. To understand the concept of coolitude in its entirety, the intellectual context from which it emerges has to be understood, that is, the reasons behind its arrival upon the scene of cultural and identitarian recuperative ideologies, teeming as it is with notions such as Négritude, Créolité, Antillanité and Indianoceanism.

Sartre wrote of Césaire's Négritude efforts: '[he chose to] pick up the word "nègre" which had been thrown at him like a stone' (in *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, 13). This reappropriation of a pejorative was crucial as a positive affirmation of a painful history (where further terms of abuse such as 'négraille' and 'négrillon' are dignified by Césaire in his *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*) which contributed, as Benita Parry writes, to a 'tropological construction of blackness as a sign of the colonised condition and its refusal' (179). A distinctly anti-colonial stance which sought to highlight the Harlem Negro Renaissance slogan of 'black is beautiful', Négritude became the expression of the 'Black predicament' and was appropriately defined as 'a theory of the distinctiveness of African personality and culture' (Carter, Torabully, 2). Senghor wrote that the theory of Négritude was launched to attach a personality to one's nation and thus 'we wanted to go back to our sources and rediscover the values of civilisation of black Africa' (in Finn, 45). Its influence on writers and artists seeking racial and cultural confirmation was immense especially in the Francophone world. Mauritian writers like René Noyau, Emmanuel Juste and André Legallant used the poetics of Négritude as the foundation of their black diasporic voices, as did Alain Lorraine and Jean Albany from the island of Réunion. Important as it was as a decolonising strategy within the historical context of

its time, Négritude was subsequently criticised for its essentialist stance which perpetuated Western stereotypes of the Black psyche and contributed to the Negrophilia phase of European taste in art between the two world wars. Furthermore it excluded the history and significance of other racial composites within multiracial societies. Jack Corzani states that ‘when Césaire re-imagined Martinique, he emphasised the Black and African components of his multicultural island to the detriment of other ethnic groups’ (in Rosello, 22). Thus, with this in mind, Césaire’s ‘rebellious sons’, as Mireille Rosello puts it, Raphael Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau and Jean Bernabé from Martinique wrote a counter-discourse to Négritude, *Eloge de la Créolité/ In Praise of Creoleness* which became the founding text of the theory of Créolité.

The Créolité movement was formed by the need to animate the Creole sensibility (Creole here is used to denote ‘mix’ rather than ‘Black’ or ‘Mulatto’ or ‘European’ as it is sometimes used to mean) in Caribbean society, mainly through the expression of literature. It prioritises opacity above clarity, multiplicity over singularity and attempts to go beyond the essentialism of Négritude, and as Torabully claims ‘the geographical limitations attached to Antillanité’ (152). However, its exclusivity to Caribbean islands already brackets it geographically and therefore limits its applicability in a wider context. The French Caribbean writer Maryse Condé has stayed apart from the movement precisely because of its Caribbean-centredness. (in Carter, Torabully, 8). A further limitation of Créolité is offered by Glissant who states that it is in danger of, as Nick Coates writes, ‘privileging state over process, being over becoming’ (260). Thus although Créolité has been defined as ‘an interpretation of creolization that blends diverse sources and is essentially an unfinished process by which human groups blend their histories and imaginaires’

(Carter, Torabully, 149), its weakness lies perhaps in its theoretical value which has not been practically transferred. The Indian referent has not been made properly prominent amidst the dynamics of cultural interplay¹⁰. Thus, Torabully states that it is the Afrocentrist orientation of Créolité which has made coolitude a necessary ideology for the recuperation of the Indian constituent not just in the Caribbean but also for the ‘process of the creation of a mosaic self in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, Fiji, South Africa, Kenya, Zanzibar, Mauritius or wherever else [Indians] may be’ (Carter, Torabully, 149). Instead of a geographically exclusive ideology, coolitude aims to at once express an inter-global coolie predicament and place it within a local multicultural context.

The founding text of coolitude is Torabully’s 1992 collection of poetry *Cale d’Etoiles Coolitude*¹¹ which is divided into 3 sections “The Book Metissage”, “The Book of the Voyage” and “The Book of Departure”. The nature of the division is cyclical so that the pivot of the poetic experience is ‘The Book of Voyage’ which illuminates the centrality or the point of origination of the discourse of coolitude: the voyage. This is the primary difference between Négritude and coolitude, that is, the interpretation of origins. Where Négritude looks back to the ‘Motherland’ for

10 It should be noted however that Véronique Bragard in her forthcoming publication *Voyages into Coolitude: Kala Pani Women’s Cross-cultural Creative Memory* has pointed out that Confiant’s latest novel *La panse du chacal* is centred entirely on the coolie experience. Furthermore, Confiant’s substantial participation in the December 10th and 11th Conference on coolitude “Voyage en Coolitude” in Paris 2004 perhaps indicates the new orientation in the process of creolization, where ‘coolienness’ is being recognised as a crucial component of the cultural mosaic. His urging of Torabully to write the discourse of coolitude attests to its acknowledged necessity as the ideology begins to gain attention and importance. Créolité might be stepping aside for the poetics of coolitude.

¹¹ *Cale d’Etoiles* is published separately from *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*. Torabully’s collection of poetry has not been translated from the French into English. Certain poems however have been translated and published in *Coolitude: An Anthology* and all translations quoted in this thesis have been taken from that source.

confirmation, coolitude refers to the crossing of the *kala pani* where the destruction and creation of coolie identity occurred. Thus, although Négritude and coolitude ‘sprang from the same tragedy’ (Carter, Torabully, 147), the differences between them are clear. When Torabully met Aimé Césaire in 1997 at Fort de France, Césaire told him ‘now I can die in peace. Coolitude is the poetic force I was waiting for... you will do for India what I did for Africa’ (Carter, Torabully, 144-47). The ultimate referent for Césaire had always been Africa, but for Torabully India becomes the background rather than the primary force of coolitude’s poetics. Thus, Torabully says that Césaire’s words ‘suddenly brought home to me a difference in our poetics and in the foundations of our approach’ (147). Véronique Bragard further distinguishes Négritude and coolitude by stating that while the former’s reconstituted pejorative ‘nigger’ is associated with colour and a specific ethnic identity, coolitude’s ‘coolie’ ‘refers more to a bondage and servitude’ which is not merely applicable to Indians as the term was used to refer to Chinese labourers as well. She aptly cites Paget’s comment that ‘coolitude is a discourse that takes the theme of the postcolonial recovery of centred cultures from Négritude and Indianité along with the theme of métissage from Créolité and reinscribes them in a structural (semiotic) framework rather than a logical, national, ethnic or geographical one’ (71), which affirms the applicability of coolitude in a wider context, that is, beyond the physicality of space, but within a purgative metaphor for dislocation, where a true poetics of dispersal is allowed expression, without the chains of nation, place or race. What finally prevails in coolitude is the revival of the servile, the rehabilitation of the neglected.

Recollection of the journey that transformed Indians into coolies is the first step towards reconstituting the coolie and his descendants in a multicultural society. Thus, even as the memorial space is not a refuge but a hell of sorts, revisitation is

crucial. The grotesque is a necessary dimension in these revisionary efforts, where instinctual horror is felt as the vividness of the coolie voyage is described by observers of the past, ‘...it was a beastly sight, coolies crowded together like beasts’ (Carter, Torabully, 79). Collective memory is integral but not to the point of exclusion where the dialectics of a plural environment is neglected at the expense of an established identity. What should ensue once the act of re-membering has begun is the acknowledgement of other co-existing social and cultural elements. It follows that the definition of coolitude is ‘a complex and dynamic one, in which, depending on the social, historical, and cultural context, a single aspect may at any time be highlighted, but which should not, in any circumstances, lead to an exclusive vision of identity’ (Carter, Torabully, 150). Thus in bringing out hitherto underrepresented racial elements the concept of multiculturalism achieves its ideal of inclusion and cohabitation in its most effective form. The course of ‘highlighting’ is never complete and along with it is the process of a never-ending identity construction which forms one of coolitude’s prime approaches to the interplay of racial referents: ‘Coolitude is a process of identity construction which takes into account the impossibility of putting a full stop to this task, and not essentially a philosophy where the meaning is predetermined’ (Carter, Torabully, 155). The spirit of coolitude is clarified through its emphasis on disengaging the binaries of Self and Other so that what prevails is a constant connection with ‘otherness’, a Baroque insistence on crossings and ‘impurities’ in a vision where self and other interchange and engage in ‘new webs of relationships’, as Torabully states (159).

The importance of coolitude lies in its potential to transgress boundaries. It aims at creating a quilt which constitutes a poetics of migration, a force of mosaicism that lies at the heart of all multicultural societies and, finally, I will argue, an

interweaving of cross-national 'coolieness' that creates a common binder for diasporised coolie communities around the world. Its very form allows for this interconnection because it repositions the diaspora into a coolie rather than an Indian one in its centring of the mutual sea voyage which was endured by Indian labourers who were then scattered to various colonies. Coolitude provides the means to unite or 'unscatter' indentureship through maritime metaphors which symbolize the experience of migration and its disengagement from a stoic 'Indianness'. The purpose of this unification is not to homogenise the diaspora, but to understand the (hi)story of an often neglected faction of the politics and cultures of many nations across the globe, such as Guyana, Trinidad, Martinique, Guadeloupe, South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji and Malaysia. In drawing together the shared history of indentureship, the spaces between the nations themselves are being bridged, so that what can be called an anti-neocolonial globalisation is formed.

In the course of discussing the texts through coolitude, various relevant theories such as Créolité and Négritude and the works of Caribbean theorists like Edoard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Wilson Harris as well as French theorists such as Gaston Bachelard, will be frequently used. This is because coolitude, as a relatively new conceptualisation, comes from a theoretical history (both Caribbean and French as Torabully's intellectual and cultural backgrounds stem from the two) that cannot be separated from its formulations. Furthermore, in line with its assertions of 'mosaicness' and the 'baroque', coolitude continually borrows from this theoretical tradition but maintains its uniqueness and importance by bringing in the previously neglected element of the coolie.

ii) 'A new diaspora'

'By race I'm Indian/...By religion I'm Buddhist/ By history British/ by culture Caribbean/ And by ambition American./ ...I speak creolese/ Write English/ Read Urdu/ And sing Frank Sinatra' --- (P.D. Sharma, "Diaspora", 233).

*'By coolitude I mean that strange mingling of tongues, which shatters the hearts of millions of men, for a history of crystal and spices, of cloths and clods. At this new dawn, my hopes of an Encounter...So that my Odyssey and my voyages as a coolie will not sink into vacuity, I launch my cargo of stars towards nascent horizons. As I know my crew will firmly dissolve frontiers to widen the country of Man' --- (Khal Torabully, *Cale d'Etoiles Coolitude*, 219).*

It is precisely the 'mingling of tongues' and the recuperation of history through a fluid and creative memory which Torabully expounds in his imaginings of coolitude that informs the present quest to view the coolie diaspora transnationally, with a global sensibility, in the hopes of extending as Torabully phrases it, 'the country of Man'. For in this age of interconnections and reconstruction, identities which are 'flying, shifting, changing places and forms, moving around numerous locations and conceptualizations' (Bragard, 2), are beginning to be accepted as indeterminate and, by their very nature, plural. As K.S. Maniam states in his conceptualisation of a 'new diaspora', the common imaginative and mental spaces inhabited by communities in exile evolve from the recognition that 'man has been artificially categorised into a monocultural, ethnic and political being when multiplicity is his true nature'. ("The New Diaspora"). The 'new diaspora', Maniam suggests, should be one that is fundamentally cross-cultural which seeks to disengage itself from dangerous notions of racial purity and even nationalism, and appropriates instead an awareness of coexisting cultures. The product of this new diaspora is the new diasporic man (and woman) who 'occupies several cultural spaces just as he does several imaginative spaces'. And the urge to 'disarm the genealogical rhetoric of

blood, property and frontiers' (in Mannur and Braziel, 8), as Paul Carter states, is more than ever imperative in the growing dissolution of racial and national boundaries.

But extending the Indian labour diaspora transnationally through a reading of the literature that it has produced is perhaps running the risk of using the very 'rhetoric of blood' to conjoin spaces through the notion of 'Indianness' or 'coolieness'. Is biology then the sole means of augmenting the coolie diaspora? The answer is an ambivalent one. Yes, it must to some extent employ biology to define itself, to, as Torabully insists 'lay down my roots' (65), but it must ultimately reject puritanical racial associations in favour of a mobilisation of cultural referents within a plural context. Thus, what materialises is 'no longer the Hindu man from Calcutta/ But the coral flesh from the Indies' (223). The coral, then, becomes the symbol of the coolitude aesthetic because it elucidates the Janus-type nature of the Indian migrant: 'The coral can be both soft, and hard, it can be found in two states, and it is traversed by currents, continuously open to new thoughts and systems' (Carter, Torabully, 152). For the main drive behind the ethics of coolitude is firstly, the recollection of the coolie's past, and secondly, the interplay between cultures that has shaped the 'new diasporic' being. It seeks to animate the coolie element as a 'referent among referents', acknowledging in the process 'a mythical India as the Ultimate Referent, as a way of maintaining values of the "Original Land"' (Carter, Torabully, 147).

The new diaspora, Maniam states, is identified through its chameleon ¹²

12 The chameleon as a trope for diasporic sensibility is an apt one which elaborates the continual deferral of identity. Indo-Caribbean writer Kamala Kempadoo locates her self-representation in this very figure of ambiguity: 'I could see myself as a chameleon, with no fixed appearance and no sense of an essential self, yet could enjoy the multiple spaces available due to the simultaneous inhabiting of different cultures' (in Mehta, 16).

structure, which works against a cultural close-doorism. I will extend this view by suggesting that the new diaspora also works against a national closed-doorism. Thus as the Indian migrant inhabits several spaces within his/her own national context, he/she also possesses the ability to dwell in spaces outside of a national familiarity. In this way, interconnections are multi-layered. On the one hand, identification happens at a co-cultural level within a specific geographical and multiracial sphere and on the other, the ‘global Indian diaspora village’ (Motwani and Motwani) provides a means of identification on a common historical, root level. The notion of the ‘new diaspora’ echoes the ideology of coolitude in that it affirms the vitality of inclusion and connection, multifariously and beyond the strictures of false boundaries, but at the same time, it cannot forsake definite identities. In referring to the writer and socialist Kassim Ahmad’s notion of ‘cultural patriotism’ amidst multiculturalism, Maniam postulates the positive potential in cultural affirmation, but only in the widest sense of the concept where ‘a faithful representation of the realities found in the multicultural country’ (“A New Diaspora”) becomes important in the avoidance of an assimilationist dissolution of distinct identity. The new diaspora, thus, will maintain its specificity even as it extends itself to encapsulate mental, imaginative, emotional and material spaces through its desire to cross defined frontiers for its involvement in an international process of *metissage*.

e) The Literary Landscape

i) Transnational Approach

Linda Hutcheon writes that ‘in a globalized culture like that of the twenty-first

century, one clear alternative [to an organicist model of national literary history] would be to move from a single national to a comparative transnational focus' (26). She draws attention to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's similar inclinations in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* where the latter observes that her book 'charts a practitioner's progress from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies' (45). This method is pertinent to the mosaic structure of the present world touched as it is by a non-teleological and non-linear narrativisation of nation (Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation", *The Location of Culture*), where diaspora is reimagined into the nation, and 'host' and diasporic cultures venture into a post-national space. But of course an inevitable warning must accompany this 'universalisation' or an all-embracing globalisation, which diffuses specificities for the construction of a faceless whole. Transnationalism repositions ideas of race, class, ethnicity, nationality and so on, but it could be accused of replacing one regulation for another, where the universal becomes a riveted organicist concept, neglecting the intricacies of location, difference, *difference* and aporias. But diasporic globalisation is not the imperialist or neo-colonial globalisation which is steeped in what Spivak calls 'the untrammelled financialization of the globe'(68). Diasporic globalisation is a cultural formation that does not wholly deracinate as it were even as it rips the roots from the soil, being undaunted by its own 'contrapuntality' (Said), rooted and rootless, dual in the interstices of boundaries, therefore never immobile but continually engaged in *kala pani* hybridity.¹³ Boundaries then are continually being violated within the discourse of a postnationalist diasporic imaginary, and Anzaldua's

¹³ The notion of *kala pani* hybridity is propounded by Brinda Mehta. It explores intercultural exchange through a *kala pani* migrational lens. Particular emphasis is given to a gendered view on migration.

new mestiza which accommodates contradictions and plurality perfectly captures the tone and texture of the diasporan sensibility, whose person ‘learns to juggle cultures’ (45). The reading of diasporic literature, in this case, transnational coolie diasporic literature, while acknowledging the national literary framework¹⁴, is meant to disengage from the group-by-group approach to studies of Indian labour migration, which have promoted an abstracted version of the phenomenon, and thus, in the words of Henry Louis Gates, has become a thing associated with ‘homogeneously conceived ethnic groups’ (215-16). The transnational approach is also a dialogic one, in Bakhtinian terms, where closure or resolution is not sought, being more concerned with the engagement of voices. Finally, the advice of Said rings true for the present intellectual endeavour:

Scholars can be frankly engaged in the politics and interests of the present--- with open eyes, rigorous analytical energy, and the decently social values of those who are concerned with the survival neither of a disciplinary fiefdom or guild nor of a manipulative identity like “India” or “America”, but with the improvement and non-coercive enhancement of life in a community struggling to exist among other communities (*Culture and Imperialism*, 312).

ii) The texts

The chapters of the present thesis will be divided according to the writers and their texts. Chapter 2 will deliberate Dabydeen’s stance as an exemplary coolitude writer in his two novels *The Counting House* and *Our Lady of Demerara*. The former will be dealt with in relation to the poetics of migration, the depths and desires of the *kala pani* woman, interracial engagements, sexual rivalry and palimpsest and

¹⁴ This recognition of the national is nevertheless important where ‘nation’ still serves as a means of *certain* identification, but it is not complete or self-sufficient. As Hutcheon states, ‘in our global world the nation, as a geographical, political, no longer the only possible focus of literary history’ (29).

collective memory in association with ghosts of the new landscape. The latter novel, I will argue, unlike *The Counting House* which details the tenets of coolitude, is a *performance* of coolitude with its non-linear narrative strategies that accommodate various voices, both past and present, both historically proximate and distant, where racial elements are biologically and non-biologically interwoven, and ‘coolieness’ becomes a referent among other referents, and a colonial web of space is created through the connections made between England, Ireland and Guyana. This performance is the goal of coolitude’s aesthetics in that identity is continually rehearsed, points of interaction are never spatially fixed and endings or ‘deaths’ are never complete. Vision is cyclical, where the Hindu philosophy of reincarnation meets Wilson Harris’s notions of ‘infinite rehearsals’ and ‘unfinished genesis of the imagination’.

Chapter 3 focuses on the novels of K.S. Maniam, *The Return* and *In A Far Country*. The former tackles the question of education as a means of social mobility, which echoes one of coolie literature’s prime themes. Language and knowledge are treated as modes of cultural interweaving which offer progression beyond the ghetto mentality of a Malayan Indian plantation community trapped in its own delusional ethnic compartment. The issue of diaspora is approached through the balancing of ‘sea’ and ‘land’ in the Indo-Malaysian imaginary, and myths of origination are challenged by the Babelian chaos effected through transplantation, thereby activating coolitude’s faith in the voyage as offering new perceptions of origins and an osmosis of various cultural elements. *In A Far Country* attempts to employ, with its magical realist approach, the Glissantian ‘chaos monde’ that Dabydeen achieves in *Our Lady of Demerara*. It seeks to mobilise the Indian element against the Malay and the Chinese ones in order to prove the myth of the nation. Malaysia, thus, is chimerical

but its phantasm is not negative because its nation-lessness accommodates the diasporic sensibility.

Chapter 4 analyses Satendra Nandan's novel *The Wounded Sea* and collection of poetry *Lines Across Black Waters*. The sea, which occupies significant literary space in both works, is explored in relation to its vitality for the construction of Indo-Fijian identity, where the pertinence of the sea as both destructive and creative is reflective of coolitude's assimilation of the signifiers of coolie migration. The form of the novel will be studied as an approach to hybridity in its commingling of art and autobiography, thereby questioning monologic generic methods of fictionalising the life of a community. This also politicises the state of the Indians in Fiji, and explicates the actual imbalance of interplay between cultures. The use of myth to relativise history is scrutinised as a mode of 'conquering time' in Nandan's poetry and this serves to unfasten the bonds of memory which make it nostalgic. Re-membering thus, a key feature in the poetics of coolitude, is 'unfossilised' and serves to parallel the present state of things, exemplifying Glissant's notion of the 'prophetic vision of the past'.

Chapter 2: David Dabydeen's *The Counting House* and *Our Lady of Demerara*

The Counting House is concerned with the revisitation of history in an attempt to challenge the boundaries between official and unofficial accounts of the past. By emphasizing the 'scraps' of coolie history, which magnifies the seemingly miniature, the novel dwells on the foremost facet of coolitude: a re-membering of the poetics of migrations. Psychical aspects of coolie indentureship are highlighted as a means of 'writing back' to colonial representations of the Indian labourers while fabricating an alternative story of migration. Deeply imbedded in the discourse of departure and arrival is the pertinence of the sea voyage in the destruction and creation to coolie identity. Instead of capturing the second middle passage merely in literal terms, the novel also explores the sea voyage on various metaphorical levels, namely the psychological and the sexual. In adherence to the second aspect of coolitude, *The Counting House* proceeds to examine the racial dynamics in Guyana, following the establishment of the coolie community in their new country. *Our Lady of Demerara* extends the mosaic of racial interplay by involving several geographical and cultural spaces in a web of colonial connectivity. The novel demonstrates the links between Guyana, India, Coventry and Ireland while highlighting the place of the coolie at this global juncture, thus displaying coolitude's emphasis on mobilizing the coolie element amidst the baroquism of multicultural societies. *Our Lady of Demerara* plays out notions such as Wilson Harris' 'The Infinite Rehearsal' through a fusion of Amerindian and Hindu belief systems that stress the inevitability of reincarnation in what appears to be a chaos of incidents. But the novel creates its own logic of chaos to display the non-Cartesian rhythm of 'Peoples of the Sea' which is evident in their landscape, religion and language.

a) *The Counting House*

'What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it' – (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Observer*, January 21, 2001).

i) The text's motivations

In the event of recapturing under-represented historical moments, the burden of memory becomes magnified. If one were to identify with Harris' 'memory theatre' which explicates 'an acceptance of amnesiac fate that diminutive survivors begin to unravel' (52), where diminutives signify the spatial absences of hegemony, then memory's quest is to recover parallel timescapes. He explains that 'it is essential to create a jigsaw in which "pasts" and "presents" and likely or unlikely "futures" are the pieces that multitudes in the self employ in order to bridge chasms in historical memory' (49). While *The Counting House* hardly experiments with temporal factions, as *Our Lady of Demerara* does, its motivations, which are historically inscribed within a discourse of reassessment and reinstatement, incline towards a certain chronology. This chronology, however, is not one determined by linearity, although we are informed of a particular time-period within which the process of coolie indentureship was taking place and certainly a specific geographical context which then brings into question the issue of space. The chronology in question leans towards the poetical, the psychical and the personal which are intertwined with the baggage of history and its repercussions. One is reminded of a Rushdian remedy to historiography, wherein distinctions between the private and the public are forsaken for a firsthand language and a neoteric representation of the past, present and future.

In *The Counting House*, a patent indication of this is at the very start of the novel where the text's story begins with opinions by historical figures and a short paragraph describing, in a prosaic manner, the incentives behind coolie indentureship. Mr Gladstone, for instance, is recorded to have said that "No account of coolie experience can ever be complete for they are scraps of history" and the subsequent paragraph records that 'African slaves were freed in the West Indies in 1838, and between then and 1917 the British shipped half-a-million Indians ('coolies') to the

region as replacement labour' (xi). What follows, however, is somewhat contradictory: 'In the ruined counting house of Plantation Albion, British Guiana, three small parcels of materials survive as the only evidence of the nineteenth-century Indian presence' (xi). The parcels allude to a mystery, a wrapped object to be unravelled, within which lies a glimpse into human survival and relationship, elements that are missing in the preceding statements. The absorption of the personal, signified by the third parcel, whose contents include 'a cow-skin purse, a child's tooth, an ivory button, a drawing of the Hindu God, Rama, haloed by seven stars, a set of iron needles, some kumari seeds, and an empty tin marked 'Huntley Dominion Biscuits', its cover depicting a scene of the Battle of Waterloo'¹⁵ (xii), takes on the shape of Harrisian diminutives, which will be explored in some detail later on. What is significant is the contrast between the parcels. On the one hand, two out of the three parcels characterize the pragmatism and officialisation of indentureship: 'The first two parcels consist mostly of lists of Indian names, accounts of wages paid to them, and scraps of letters' (xii). On the other, the final parcel represents the more profound connotations of the historical moment, in its salvaging of intimate objects which stand for a somewhat ineffable aspect of the process of migration and labour. The mobilisation is between the functional colonial realities and the storied persistence of survival.

In contrasting these two elements of coolie experience, Khal Torabully comments on the state of language in this dichotomy of expression: 'I am referring to 'transparence' as founding the pragmatic 'culture' of the colonial society where efficiency was increased by using, for instance, basic words for several tasks,

¹⁵ This is the same biscuit tin referred to in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Dabydeen is possibly linking the objects to illuminate the palimpsest of colonial narratives, suggesting that a parallelization of events is feasible.

sometimes reducing Creole language to a mere ghost of syntax and grammar' (Torabully, Carter, 172). And while language is the most manifest of examples in terms of the practical versus the poetic, or the exploited versus the liberated, signifiers such as those contained in the third parcel stand for the battle against colonial transparency in the oppressor/oppressed dialectic. For they come to represent the defiance against an easy classification of experience, and expand towards a corruption of the 'inside' and the 'outside', or the 'private' and the 'public', where in this 'ambiguous space', as Gaston Bachelard suggests, 'the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and the spirit is drifting' (218). This is a space that rejects institutionalisation and invites an uncanny look at possibilities that extend beyond the purely ocular and substantial. In this sense, the space created by the parcel's 'diminutives' meditates not simply on the symbology of indentureship, but on its potential to bypass strict polarities.

Diminutives, according to Harris, lead towards, while they embody, a cross-cultural imagination. Each one 'exists as it were in a certain field or upon a certain frontier or margin of being, to apprise us of the polar life of other fields, to warn us of the necessity to *read* the mutual attraction of apparently remote poles of existence, to warn us to create a new space or interrelationship in which to transform a threat that may overwhelm us if we adhere to block, institutional habit' (22). In this sense, they exist as indicators of rupture, newness and prorogation as well as promoting a phenomenological appreciation of 'contamination' and expansion. Thus, the cow-skin purse, a child's tooth etc. not only allow for the story to unfold as if a puzzle to which clues are attached, but they also act as miniature entities that contain worlds of racial and cultural engagement. In effect, what becomes possible is a study of the 'miniature', or topophilia, which relates to 'the vastness of the inside' (Bachelard,

152), a state gripped by the imagination, wherein non-linearity surpasses historical quiddity, and the world, because it exists imaginatively, is able to be possessed.

Hence, while the text refrains from offering a meta-story of coolie indentureship in Guyana, it is confident enough to proclaim its nature. For what is conspicuous in the novel's representation of coolie history, is that it is hardly concrete, existing as it does in 'scraps': Gladstone's proclamation that coolie experience is nothing but 'scraps of history', the '*scraps* of letters' (xii, my emphasis) and the 'scraps' of material that function as evidence to the coolie presence in Guyana. The scraps thus represent the small within the large, which then also implies, in the Bachelardian sense, the large contained in the small. For according to Bachelard, 'values become engulfed in miniature, and miniature causes men to dream' (152). The dream is one rife with imagination and amorphism, allowing room for expansion and eventualities. And in the rapidly dilating space, diminutives surface.

Fairy tales and nursery rhymes become the most obvious choice for presenting visual symbology of, in the case of the novel, 'scraps', because they tend to 'associate extraordinary images as though they could be coherent images, imparting the conviction of a primal image to an entire ensemble of derivative images' (Bachelard, 163-4). Additionally, in the discourse of re-membering history, they stop the movement of time through the cohesion of images that exists within the motivation of the rhyme so that memory becomes vertical rather than horizontal, ie, providing depth rather than breadth. Jacques Lyotard's criterion of 'narrative forms' which includes nursery rhymes where 'time ceases to be a support for memory' (in Benitez-Rojo, 168) is relevant to the understanding that such genres of expression provide medias through which time and even space are of little value, prioritising as they do, the visual and the way in which it articulates the silent spaces woven in between the

rhythm and the words. Hence, simply from the nursery rhyme that precedes the text, the implication of something bigger than a mere determination of dates, is deducible:

*the King was in the counting house
counting out his money
the Queen was in the parlour
eating bread and honey
the maid was in the garden
hanging out the clothes
when down came a blackbird
and pecked off her nose*

This sets off the motion of the text, where the counting house, while remaining the pivot of the story with its inference of greed and financial aspiration, also produces a dimension for perceiving the sequence of events and characters to follow. It is of significance that the nursery rhyme chosen as a preface of sorts for the novel is only a section of “Sing a Song of Sixpence”, thus highlighting the potential reasons for the selection of that particular verse. The origin of the nursery rhyme most probably dates back to the 1700s and its interpretations are by no means homogenous. (“Sing a Song of Sixpence”, Rhymes.org).

However, the most relevant reading of it in the context of the novel is one that deciphers the poem as consisting of coded messages for the recruitment of crew members for private vessels, instigated mainly by Blackbeard, the king of the pirates, to whom the ‘King’ in the nursery rhyme refers. The obvious connotation of the counting house is one of money where Blackbeard would count the cash to be given to prospective crew. The fifth line, ‘The maid was in the garden’, stands for the knowledge that the route of the prize ships was known, but more significantly, the ‘garden’ was a coded word for the waters around the Carolines down to the Caribbean. (“Sing a Song of Sixpence, Rhymes.org). Thus within the implications of the nursery rhyme are hieroglyphic allusions to piracy, plundering, exploitation and

sea voyages which relate specifically to the Caribbean. Of course, one could argue that variations of the meaning of the nursery rhyme could disprove this ready assumption of pilfering and maritime adventure, but in the context of the novel, the poem was arrantly chosen with care in view of its insinuations. The meaning of this method is perhaps more important than the content of the rhyme. As nursery rhymes signify hidden meanings, and can be read as tropes of some kind, their subversive nature is extended to the novel, with its implications of code, complexity and opacity. Thus through the nursery rhyme and its importation of sea voyaging, ships and reconnaissance, the prologue is somewhat highlighted as it reveals the deliquescent tones beneath the putatively hardened facts of indentureship. Hence, it seems a natural progression for the novel to move from the poem to the 'diminutives' as it performs what the text is obviously trying to do and that is to recapture history, not as an all-encompassing one, but one that exists in fragments, or 'scraps', which then 'unshackles the logic of perpetual nightmare' (Harris, 22) through the formation of, rather than an empirical space, an intuitive one. In this intuitive space, memory is dug up in the free floating space of history, following, as Glissant states, 'the latent signs that have [been] picked up in the everyday world' ("The Quarrel with History"). These 'latent signs' in the Glissantian sense resemble Harrisian 'diminutives' in that they both recover from the mundane potential uncanny instances that reconstitute the perception of 'inside' and 'outside', where the two become confused, thus allowing for an exchange of matter, an ambiguity of what is 'real'. In other words, this is an imaginative space, one that is contradictorily not spatial, but perhaps more inclined to the spiritual, as both Bachelard and Santayana have conceived of as non-geometrical where energy is boundless and unrestrained by linearity. In this way, then, that is in the intuitive space, history is able to become creative resistance and power where as

Victor Segalen suggests ‘the blank space on the map or the cartographic wilderness becomes a stage of constant potential renewal’ (*The Aesthetics of Diversity*, 209)¹⁶. It is the very ‘magical process of intuition’ that Harris evokes when thinking about the past. And while the idea of historical restitution is one that is common in the field of postcolonial studies to the point of triteness, it is nevertheless an indispensable tool that, especially, in the area of relatively under-explored academic territory such as the case of coolies in the Caribbean, is crucial without having to be unchallenging or unimaginative as *The Counting House* has managed to display. For, the reassessment of the past, Bénédicte Ledent reminds us, is ‘indeed a source of regeneration and identity for the rootless and dismembered peoples of former colonies, even though such (re)consideration-- a process George Lamming called “the backward glance”-- inevitably involves some suffering’ (271). The suffering is ubiquitous within the novel, in various forms including poverty, the grotesque, psychological torture and racial friction, and prevails as the most powerful source of creativity in the text.

i) The poetics of migration

The first and perhaps also most self-consciously postcolonial form of historical reassessment that the novel performs is the process of ‘writing back’. In this case, the act of ‘writing back’ is aimed at colonial representations of coolies, mainly by British Indian Officials who typecast the coolie as a ‘helpless victim’ (Carter, Torabully, 51)

¹⁶ All future quotations by Segalen will be taken from this source.

whose docility meant that he had very little or no ambition at all. George Grierson recorded that 'the Indian coolie's aspirations...seldom rise beyond his being a well-paid coolie servant, and nothing more' (Torabully, Carter, 51). Thus the novel self-consciously depicts Rohini and Vidia at different levels of ambition. In reference to Vidia, his financial greed, which constitutes the basis of his aspirations, is mentioned at the very start with him 'fretting over his money, wanting more, wanting a sack stuffed with coins' (3). The contrast between the superstitious or the spiritual and the tangible is made from this very point, in Guyanese coolie society, where Vidia 'took no chances with the spirits which lived in the branches, no longer bothering to leave a spoonful of sugar or a lily-leaf of fresh cow's milk at the base of the tree as an offering to ward off their malice' (3) simply because 'the living, thieving coolies were more dangerous than they' (3). At once, the shift that has occurred due to migrational dynamics is made clear, signifying that adjustment in the new land requires a somewhat practical approach to survival, but it also indicates a perpetuation of another stereotype. In the event of subverting the image of the ambitionless coolie, the formation of another image, the greedy coolie, surfaces. This indicates the presence of two elements in the depiction of coolies. Firstly, that stereotypes persist and contain in them constituents of truth. Secondly, that the subversion of one does not entirely negate their presence. But this interplay or perpetuation of stereotypes is part of the discourse of colonial perceptions of coolies, one that has formed and shaped the assumptions of their roles and characters, even to the present moment in the Caribbean where traces of these putative traits linger to cause further division between the races. And the function of stereotypes to maintain the freshness of images, where their repetition and repeatability do not signify a mundane cycle, but a renewed telling for each unique moment of repetition, display the relevance of stereotypes in the

dynamics of identity-formation. As Bhabha affirms: ‘the same old stories of the Negro’s animality, the coolie’s inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish which *must be* told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time’ (24)

Before engaging in the text’s approach to stereotypes, it is crucial to understand the implications of such block-printing in the machine of labour control, both materially and socially. Two facets of the process of stereotyping fitted the workings of the colonial system. In the first case, as the editors of *They Came in Ships* inform us, Indian characters were used to justify ‘indenture as a benevolent system of free labour in which Indians were docile, industrious, thrifty and sturdily independent’ (11). And in the second instance, ‘Indians were variously child-like in their dependence, deceitful, revengeful and prone to absenteeism unless driven. Such stereotypes were used to justify the need for the harshly penal system of labour control’ (11). Even in the literary representations of indentured labourers, conformity to fixed concepts of the so-called coolie disposition remained. In the Guyanese context, novels written by Europeans about Indian indentureship such as Edward Jenkins’ *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877), Rev. J.G. Pearson’s *The New Overseer’s Manual* (1890), Rev. J.D. McKay’s *Under the Southern Cross* (1904) and A.R.F. Webber’s *Those That Be In Bondage: A Tale of Indian Indenture and Sunlit Western Waters* (1917) portrayed Indians in a way that marked their character as auxiliary to their function within the colonial machine. The intricacies of personality and culture are overshadowed by an authorial desire to implicate the abuses of the indentureship system. In other words the characterization of the coolie was two-dimensional, favouring instead an elaboration of the evils of the system. Additionally, as Carter and Torabully explicate, the coolie in literature ‘continued to be fixed in the colonial

novel, firmly attached to his hoe, eyes cast down, while his daughters increasingly peopled the fantasies of story-tellers who portrayed them in helpless, hopeless sexual bondage to the white salaried staff of the sugar estates' (62). The coolie woman thus suffered a further removal from an accurate or rather a full representation of her capacities not merely as a labouring and sexual entity but as a human being with emotive, spiritual and mental inclinations.

Thus in *The Counting House*, Dabydeen attempts to present Rohini, while realistically adhering to the complications of place, space and tradition, as a psychologically holistic Indian woman, before and after the event of migration. The method of writing back used by Dabydeen has one very crucial function, and that is the clearing of space for the displaced, an action pursued by many postcolonial theorists, namely Gayatri Spivak, with the intention of restructuring attitudes without the residues of oppression and which then allows the subaltern an attempt at self-representation. Hence, Rohini's putative existentialist crisis with its attempts to create a psychically rounded Indian and then coolie woman marks the first step towards the extrication of space. And within this space, the ability to contemplate the dynamics of migration becomes possible. What, for instance, compelled women like Rohini to leave their *janmabhumi* (motherland) for something unknown, a mysterious journey to a land of promise (but without the certainty of it)? For we are informed early on in the novel that Rohini's 'inheritance was secure until the day the recruiter came and filled her head with fable' (4). With all the possible theories concerning the reasons for migration, explicated in detail in Chapter 1 of the present work, financial necessity being one of the prime motivators for leaving, the highlighted one in Rohini's case appeals to the imagination, a fable laden with dream, potential and magic: ' " Guiana is the very land of Ramayana....And it have so much gold there that you don't have

enough hand and neck and foot to wear bangle. You wish you had ten hands like Lord Shiva, and even then you run out of skin''(4). Furthermore, the temptation of Guiana is augmented by an inveiglement to the divine: 'This is how Rohini re-membered him, doing his duty to God' (4).

The posed question would be, was life in India inadequate for a woman like Rohini, or was the enticement of something new and therefore tantalizing, an independent migrational actuation? The answer is less simple than the question, or perhaps the answer is already imbedded in the question. In other words, the lure of migration involved a combination of both a state of impoverishment in many forms, (ie, mental, emotional, financial) and the excitement of a fresh origination elsewhere. The problem with classifying Rohini as a coolie stereotype is that we are aware, from numerous historical and theoretical documentation, of the type of woman who migrated. Women who left were mainly single, being either widows, prostitutes or those who were escaping domestic ruts. The Royal Commission Report 1871 cited by Basdeo Mangru in his essay "The Sex-Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences Under the Indenture in British Guiana" states that the women who did emigrate were 'young widows and married and single women who have already gone astray, and are therefore not only most anxious to avoid their homes and conceal their antecedents, but were also at the same time the least likely to be received back into their families' (213). Rohini hardly fits this category of women and the reasons behind her desire to leave are complicated and more engaging than a mere economic, or even colonial explanation for migration. This works to disassociate the stereotype of the immoral female coolie, and creates instead a foil for perceiving female emigrants who were not part of the general flow. As Moses Seenarine has argued in his website "Saxakali" which is dedicated to Indian indentured migration in the Caribbean, resistance to

generalising the female migrant, who was seen as sexually accessible and depraved, results in defying three crucial points: '(1) the stereotyping of all female indentured laborers as immoral; (2) a denial of colonial responsibility in abusing Indian females during the recruitment process; and (3) a justification for targeting the most exploited of South Asian women, those who have few options besides paid sex work, to be recruited as bonded labourers.' (*Recasting Indian Women*). The layers of issues that urge Rohini forward indicate a conscious authorial intention to create a *kala pani* woman, heavy with complexities that defy an easy colonial stereotype of the Indian female migrant. The idea that the future coolie woman was debilitated in India is falsified in Rohini's case, especially in her relationship with Vidia. His commitment to her outweighs traditional expectations: 'Girls usually raised the dowry but he wanted nothing from her. He would give everything instead' (14). She clearly holds the foremost hand in their engagement where her demands are prioritised above all else: "'My tongue dry, go pick me papaya," she demanded, and off he ran to fetch the fruit' (8). Her marriage to Vidia was clearly a choice that, in the first instance anyhow, benefited her. Because 'the boy was fair-skinned and smooth-faced, with thick, healthy, black hair which shone with coconut oil' (9), the dowry expectation would be high, depriving Rohini's mother Finee of her goods and money. And despite her urging Rohini to marry an ageing, dying man whose property she would then inherit, Finee is compelled to adhere to her daughter's decision. Hence, in marital terms, Rohini managed to exercise a considerable amount of autonomy. However, the *institution* of marriage fraught with age-old regulations concerning the duties of daughters-in-law proves to be the vital instigator of Rohini's dilemma: "'I want more," Rohini told herself as she rolled roti under Droopatie's watchful eye' (26). What the 'more' indicates is difficult to decipher at this point, although we know that

what she does want is something that exceeds “salt and flour and cooking oil” (28), in other words, domestic objects that have typified her at the same time as they have restricted her need to soar beyond marital conventions. And while Vidia seemed sufficient prior to marriage, Rohini laments after marriage that, “Vidia not enough” (45). He is clearly not able to agreeably appease the hollowness of familial life. Her aspirations have reached the ‘big-big world outside, tall stone houses and courtyards with fountains and carriages rolling down wide streets...Calcutta’s buildings of red sandstone and tile-mosaics, holding up pictures of domed temples and dwellings embellished with vaults, columns, architraves’ (45). Thus, the materiality of the grand life beyond the village appeals as a polarity to her mundane matrimonial life.

This correlates with Vidia’s own quest for the tangible or more precisely, the financially tangible, which in India, is provoked by Kumar through his charlatan asceticism grounded on supposed numerological and scriptural authority. His advice to Vidia that “only money can catch Rohini pussy proper” (37) makes the further link between sex and money, a construction of the substantive which seems to be the motivating drive behind any kind of seeking in the novel. For this need of the tangible is very much rooted in the emptiness or nothingness generated by colonialism and which appears to be ubiquitous in the psyche of the colonised: “I is nothing, I own nothing and I grow up to be like you, nothing” (41). The imagery of the dissipating boar¹⁷, consumed by the machinery that is colonialism, explicates the position of India and its worth to its people, or rather its lack of worth, which then instigates the search

17 Links here can be made with one of Lord Vishnu’s nine avatars. Vishnu took the form of a boar named Varaha when Mother Earth, otherwise known as Bhoomi Devi, sank in the sea. Varaha rescued the earth from drowning. The novel could be juxtaposing the divine image of Varaha against the boar with which the British came ‘hauling’. Alternatively, the boar could be Varaha himself which the British have sucked dry, thereby depriving Indians of a potential saviour. (Jolly (translator), *The Institutes of Vishnu*, 63).

for the 'more': '[the British] came hauling a boar more huge that if you flatten it against the sky you block out Gabreta...Boar that carry enough flesh to feed God mouth, but they butcher it and build fort and barrack around it to keep you and we from what belong to all-body...No more India unless you want stay and suck bone' (44). The dichotomy here between flesh and bone, the quantifiable and the evidence of loss, comments on the state of colonial India, the reasons for Vidia and Rohini's ambitions and their desire for something apart from the vacuity of their lives. The sense of emasculation felt by Vidia due to his lack of ownership is a further possible factor in the decision to migrate: 'A wife should have her own kitchen, fireside, tawa, pot. But he was empty-handed, owning nothing he could not make himself' (33). This expurgation is confirmed when Rohini informs Vidia, ' " Vidia, you can't be a man in this place. No money here"' (52). In view of the numerous, so far economic, features propelled by colonialism, the notion of the 'greedy coolie' ,indeed, cannot be denied, but is somewhat justified and becomes a 'stereotype with depth', one that is inverted because the causes of its perpetuation are explored to expose the dynamics of its existence. Thus it is because the conditions in India, created and propagated by the British, were such, that the need and desire to migrate arose. And once in Guyana, Vidia's obsession with the accumulation of money is contrasted with the instability of other aspects of life. More importantly, the coolie was never equipped with the power or the autonomy to activate and control these dimensions: 'Only money made sense. It didn't proliferate like womb and bush, but grew steadily, one coin added cautiously to the next, the sum total always true' (104).

However, internal or local circumstances contributed to this disillusionment with home as well. While the institution of marriage worked to exhaust Rohini, the establishment of family, in the Indian context, created not only a psychical thirst for

independence but a sexual craving for maturation. From the onset of the novel, the growth of sexual awareness rests uncomfortably close to the foundation of the family. Vidia's initial ideas of sex are formed by the image of his parents fornicating: ““They act like goat...He jump on her and tumble her up till noise come, then he climb off, lie down and puff”” (16). And Finee's approach to Vidia is based on a physical appreciation, or rather non-appreciation, of her husband's deformed body: ‘Jagnat, her husband, had been a different boy from this Vidia. He was scarred everywhere, thick lines dividing his skin in patchwork fashion...[thus] when Finee saw Vidia by the village pond she knew immediately that there was danger in his body, that he would irritate her with the memory of her husband's imperfection’ (7-19). The subconscious desire to sexually appropriate her daughter's lover is somewhat implied in the statement, ‘Her daughter whom she wanted to remain a child now hinted at sexual rivalry’ (25), and is manifestly elucidated when she rips her clothes off in front of Rohini and Vidia once the news of their emigration has been divulged. More importantly, this is the first time that Vidia sees a nude woman, ‘It was the first time he had seen a woman so completely naked’ (61), and this indicates two things. Firstly, that the sexual rapport between him and his wife will be done through his mother-in-law, ie., through a mirroring of his first ocular experience with a naked woman. Secondly, the experience of sex between a newly married Indian man and his wife is stunted by the constraints imposed by the extended family. The reason why Vidia had never seen a naked woman before was purely due to the arrangements at home where he and Rohini were never given the space or the opportunity to wholly appreciate each other physically. Obligations to social conditions have impeded the holistic necessity of their relationship, and what seems imperative to Vidia is an isolation with his wife, *apart* from the bondage to father, mother, collective community and

religious expectations: 'He could be content with her alone, break free of all the bonds imposed by his parents, the village, the gods, just be loyal to her body' (30). In Rohini's case, her understanding of physical intimacy, while inevitably imbedded in her contact with Vidia, flourishes in her connection with his father where she relished in 'her power over him and the intimacy with which she probed his flesh' (51). And similar to Vidia and Finee, Rohini engages with Vidia through her connection with his father: 'Rohini had never seen Vidia naked but she knew his body and how to arouse it from these sessions with his father' (51). This sexual palimpsest, rather than acting as a positive layering of experiences, becomes an oppressive entity in the link between the two individuals, who now crave the larger space of the non-village, the non-family. Thus, when Rohini urges Vidia to migrate, he accuses her of being financially driven, but she refutes that by saying: ' " It is not money...Recruiter say Guiana have plenty land, you can turn man and own so much you can't see the fencing how it is so far in front"' (53). In other words, what is indispensable is the liberation of space, a reappropriation of physical space which acts as a foil for the reclamation of social, cultural, sexual, emotional and mental space.

Sexual starvation is paralleled with corporeal starvation by Kumar, who at first chooses to distinguish the two: " "There's the starvation you have with Rohini when you dribbling to get into her pokey, then there's starvation proper which is the spirit of India"' (40). In both instances, the intensity of deprivation that is all-present confirms the multi-layered destitution that pervades India, but as an afterthought Kumar sees the equality of dispossessions and concludes that sexual hunger results in severe suffering too: " " Come to think of it boy...you must really know what suffering is, eh? Night after night you lying there and her pokey stretch and stretch in circles...Meanwhile you stay on the bank and scrunch up tight-tight inside yourself"'

(40). Consequently Kumar suggests fleeing ““ to some other land where food plenty, where Rohini belly yield every year and you grow your own colony. Five acres and cow and wife and children”” (43). The linkage between sex, offspring and property, elements that are absent from life in India, creates a train of reasons for the feeling of impoverishment and the yearning for the ‘more’ which are prevalent motivations used in the novel to explicate the desire to migrate.

Additionally, the background of the Indian Mutiny created divisions amongst the Indians where ‘ “Law is British now...Muslim slaughtering and British fighting back, killing everybody, they don’t care who is sow-keeper from Hindu, who Brahmin from hill-Coolie. Once you is brown, is Pow! Pow!”’ (46-7). These racially tense conditions are utilized by the recruiter in the novel to create more instability on local soil, so that the drive to leave for Guyana would be heightened and justified. His meeting with the village people reaches its pivot when he suggests the killing of Muslims: ““ First, kill all the Muslims in this village,” he said, confident that his edict would be warmly received by the backward Hindus’(48). Internal divisions as well as a general antagonism towards the British, where fear was a predominant feature in colonial engagements, created an environment rife with uncertainty, suspicion and danger. Thousands were killed unsparingly on both sides of the battle and cities were destroyed, creating a climate of death, racial polarity and a further augmentation of the narcissistic concept of British supremacy. In view of such conditions, considerations of leaving would have appeared to be a natural reaction to the present atmosphere, despite warnings concerning the crossing of the *kala pani*. In fact, the sepoys of the East India Company were among the first to get involved in overseas labour.

The push/pull factors so far explored in the novel’s representation of the

complex process of coolie migration fit the banner of the *poetics* of migration where the involutions of personal, historical, gendered and cultural aspects converge or explode to illuminate the web within which factors for leaving really existed. This concept, of the traveller, the travelling and the travelled, corresponds with the notion of the modern restless voyager, uprooted and floating. Perhaps in a modernist sense, this implication of anchorlessness would become lamentable, however a postmodernist view, but more importantly in this context, in coolitude's notion of voyaging which incorporates fragments of postmodernism, this image of drifting and resurfacing emerges as a point of recuperation and liberation. In explaining the motivations of coolitude, Carter and Torabully write in the abstract of their first chapter: 'This chapter revisits the recruitment of the coolie and the experience of sea-crossing, detailing the expectations and experiences of the overseas migrant, the raw emotion of transition and upheaval, of uncertainty and struggle' (17). This suitably fits a description of how *The Counting House* has been explored so far. Coolitude mobilizes along the rhythms of the sea, focusing on the coolie odyssey as the 'ultimate voyage: the essence of journeys and the essence of Man' (Carter, Torabully, 16) and this inevitably reflects a very human endeavour of discovery, and especially in the Caribbean, the notion of the crossing, the Middle Passage(s), the tidalectics¹⁸ of experience, which contribute to a sense of, as Glissant observes, a 'subterranean convergence of histories' ("The Quarrel with History"). Once the confluence begins (for it is always in the *process* of *becoming* rather than already *become*), the experience of slavery and indentureship, which Glissant (in reference to slavery but

¹⁸ Term coined by Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite in reference to the motion of the sea. This concept will be explored later on in this chapter. The study of this concept was based on Elizabeth DeLoughrey's work, "Tidalectics: Charting the Space/ Time of Caribbean Waters".

this can also be applied to coolie indentureship) has called a transversal rather than a universal phenomenon creates a space for the proclamation that ‘we are the roots of a cross-cultural relationship’. But before engaging in the possibilities and complexities of cross-cultural relationships, the crucial first step has to be made, and that is the involution of the coolie odyssey and the salience of the sea in the re-membling of the *kala pani* voyage.

ii) The Voyage: A theoretical assessment

‘ That sea was greater than we knew./Week after week the empty round/Went with us...Sometimes in utter wonder lost/That loneliness like this could be/We stood and stared until almost/We saw no longer sky or sea,/But only the frame of time and space,/An empty floor, a vacant wall,/ And on that blank no line to trace/Movement, if we moved at all’—(Edwin Muir, “The Voyage”, 48).

The trauma of the sea voyage was enough to psychologically revile those who did survive the journey. Conditions on the ship were grossly inadequate and resulted in a proliferation of diseases and deaths. Marina Carter in her indispensable book *Voices from Indenture* highlights a report published in 1857 concerning the high rate of shipboard mortality where the causes of death are listed as ‘platforms, absence of a sick bay, increased number of women and children, changes in diet’ (37). She notes that ‘no blame was placed on the protector for poor selection of immigrants’ (37). The randomness as well as the desperation that motivates the recruiter’s selection of recruits in *The Counting House* point towards the reasons for the formation of motley groups shipped off to the Caribbean. His sole desire to gather as many coolies as possible cancels any consideration of physical, religious, class and caste suitability for

the sea voyage. This would have affected cooperation amongst the shipmates caused by possible religious conflict, but ultimately, it was not the heterogeneity of the recruits that created disharmony and death aboard the coolie ships. In fact, the common ordeal of being severed from home and surviving for months out at sea created a fresh bond among the shipmates, one that exceeded caste, class, family ties and religious convictions. The term that emerged to articulate this new kinship, *jahaji bhai*, which is Hindi or Urdu for ‘ship brother’, states Frank Birbalsingh, ‘was invented as a designation of the new relationships which the immigrants had forged with shipmates in their attempt to compensate for broken ties with family and friends they had left behind in India’ (*Jahaji*, xi). What prevailed as the evils of the voyage were the lack or absence of attention paid to the hygiene, well-being and health of the coolies.

Ron Ramdin’s account of the *Salsette* tragedy (1858) underscores the extent to which flagrant neglect eventuated in an astounding mortality rate. Among the issues that were instrumental in the escalation of the problem were ‘overcrowding...hardly any space, lack of latrines, which also then led to diseases, especially ankylostomiasis, hookworm disease’ (Ramdin, *The Other Middle Passage*, 82). Inattention to the specificities of each individual recruit contributed to the inadequacy of the coolies who left. Sirdars (overseers) insisted on the departure of even those who failed their medical examinations, thus resulting in men and women who were physically unfit to travel. Furthermore, the fact that most of the coolies had never ventured beyond their own villages added to the immensity of the crossing. Basdeo Mangru points out in his introduction to Clem Seecharan’s *Bechu* that the coolies were at a clear disadvantage because of ‘the traumatic voyage, [being] the only immigrants required to carry “passes”, extreme poverty [and having] no knowledge of English’ (2). The space of

the fall¹⁹ was negated and what ensued was a celebration of roots and an attachment to the land, sources that conflict with the diasporic passage of travel, displacement and re-placement. Thus, the censorship of the fall becomes problematic in view of the particularities of the coolie odyssey. Torabully states that such expurgation ‘may account for the hesitance of Indian descendents of accepting the Voyage as a space of dissolution and creation of identities’ (204). The Voyage as ‘process’, as a ceaseless journey without knowledge of eventualities where the ongoing motion of the ship and the waves remain tropes for the coolie’s migrational movements, is an invaluable centre for the ‘moving’ migrant. The centre is not a stationary fixation in memory, but a cyclical actuality in the span of coolie experience, within which past, present and future are imbedded. Hence, Torabully’s conceptualisation of coolitude in *Cale d’Etoiles* which presents the Voyage as the point to which all other elements in the migratory experience return, comments on the vitality of the Second Middle Passage in the destruction and reconstruction of coolie identity. (Torabully, Carter, 204).

The Voyage carries the implications of the symbology of the ship as well as the oceanic rhythms that have seeped into the psychical, social and cultural dimensions of the migrant coolie. The symbol of the slave ship has been addressed by several writers and theorists, among them Maryse Condé who suggests that ‘certain symbols, particularly the slave ship, are present in the collective unconscious and crystallize shame, suffering and anger at the same time. They are accompanied by a whole range of images: whip, blood, sweat (...) containing the same ambiguity’ (in Bragard, 38). The images that she formulates are transferable to the coolie crossing as well. Of course the specificities of the Middle Passage and the Second Middle Passage differ,

¹⁹ Khal Torabully describes the fall of the coolie as a corruption of purity where the coolie’s loss of a home is equal to a type of degeneration.

but the anguish endured in both instances is somewhat paralleled. The ambiguity that Condé refers to as well as the humiliation associated with suffering and the 'fall' is the very space that requires assessment in coolitude's agenda. A portal into this evaluation is the ship itself. Indeed, Paul Gilroy has placed the ship at the forefront of recovery in the Black Diaspora: 'Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland' (4). The ship represents the historical agony of the slaves, but it also becomes its own entity, 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion' (Gilroy, 4). Apart from its historical and theoretical inference, the ship can also be poetically estimated, as the French poet Charles Baudelaire has done in reference to the motion of the ship: 'The poetic idea that emanates from this operation of movement inside the lines is the hypothesis of a vast, immense creature, complicated but eurhythmic, an animal endowed with genius, suffering and sighing every sigh and every human ambition' (in Mary Jones, 193). The heavy sighing, the deliberation of action and the strife of existing become metaphors for the coolie and his journey, both physically and emotionally. These images also constitute the course of his identity-formation, through the fluctuations of the waves, the ongoing determination of the ship and the immensity of the sea. Bragard suggests that the strength of such aquatic metaphors 'lies in the sea's fluidity, borderlessness and eternal movement which participate in a "refusal to reflect facile rootedness" and enable a better description of identities in flux' (Chapter 2, 113). Thus, the land has been replaced by the sea. In other words, India is substituted by the Voyage. Exile is left behind for an appreciation of the continual journey. Here coolitude and creolization meet in their mutual affirmation of an ongoing rhythmic flux, unfixed and perpetual. Place becomes redefined in this context where identity is reformulated to articulate the complexities of diaspora.

Genevieve Beluge, in reference to Glissantian place which is also a Torabullian one, states that ‘based on openness and movement, Glissantian place, far from being the focus of identitarian exclusiveness is the anchoring-point from which relation becomes possible’ (in Coates, 267). Thus, it is a space that is open and alive, in constant motion, much like the ship as it progresses along the undulating waves. The ship then produces the most accurate metonym not simply for identity-construction but for the entire migrational and diasporic experience, which constitutes the point of departure, the journey and its inference of transition, the point of arrival, and the *metissage* that occurs on new land. In short, the ship shoulders the many dimensions of the poetics of migration. Bachelard states that the ship ‘contains the infinite of the word *vast*, which is a word that does not describe, but gives primal being to everything that must be described’ (193). Accordingly, this notion relates back to his concept of the ‘vast’ as providing an opening into all potentialities, ‘a state that reconciles contraries and somehow achieves synthesis through a principle of “correspondences” which then makes it possible for the reception of the immensity of the world that “correspondences” then transform into an “intensity of our intimate being”’ (Bachelard in Jones, 193). This ‘intimate being’ signifies familiarity and intimacy which is achieved through *relation*, an idea that is crucial in both Glissant’s and coolitude’s vision of the social mosaic.

Another crucial aspect of the voyage is the endlessness of water, the non-existence of any other image which the coolie could grasp and aesthetically familiarise himself with. A coolie called Sankar remarks in response to his sea voyage: ‘only water, only water, watching the water, watching the water’ (in Ramdin, *Arising from Bondage*, 46-7). That repetition, which also becomes a kind of incantation, acts as a meditative source for contemplation which then creates an

aperture in time where temporality is negated and space becomes unlimited, much like the oceanic site with its eternal and immense flow of water. And because most of the inhabitants of the Caribbean are essentially ‘sea-people’, with a history of voyaging, Benitez-Rojo has suggested that the Caribbean itself is an ambiguous realm ‘of waves, of folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity. It is...a chaos that returns, a detour without a purpose, a continual flow of paradoxes; it is a feed-back machine with asymmetrical workings’ (41). In other words, the pattern of the sea reflects the social and cultural configurations of Caribbean life, with its fluidity and aquatic tempo. Marine metaphors are especially relevant in the context of ‘people of the voyage’, whether it be the slaves or the coolies, as both were similarly affected by the fact that the long journey was also their *first* journey across the waters. Brathwaite’s term for these images, ‘tidalectics’, brings to the forefront all the elements involved in the construction of a diaspora identity amidst a recharting of history through a postcolonial lens.

iii) The novel’s voyage

The tidalectics of *The Counting House* is stressed at turning points in the novel. The oceanic moments are not explicitly or elaborately disclosed. They are, however, implicit within the structure of the text, in terms of the inception of migration and the relationships between the characters whose histories have collided through the exploitation of labour, an eventuation made possible through maritime plundering and forced voyaging. In keeping with the astrological inclinations of Kumar whose influence on Vidia provides an evaluative measure of his aspirations, the point of Vidia and Rohini’s departure for Guyana is intertwined with Kumar’s hitherto

numerological obsession with the number 7: ‘...it was in 1857 (the sum of the numbers was divisible by seven) that he and Rohini set off for Calcutta and the voyage across the Atlantic’ (65). This fact is correlated to other septimal instances in Vidia’s life: ‘Vidia emptied his jars and arranged the coins in seven piles according to their denomination. Seven was his lucky number. He was born in the seventh month of 1836. There were seven in his family’ (65). Furthermore, the atmosphere at the depot is described through yet another septuple derivation: ‘In the depot awaiting shipment, whiteman had held up a holy book called the Bible and told them in Hindi how English god made the universe in seven days’ (65). The significance of the number seven is given by Kumar and his conviction that ‘everything come in seven. Everything multiply in seven’ (35). Their departure coincides with this ‘numerical rule’ and new associations are thus invented to create unique tidalectic signs within the novel. Of course the links are not maritime ones, but they become symbols of rhizomic possibilities. For the rhizome, writes Nick Coates, ‘occupies a hybrid position: rooted, but open to alterity’ (266). The idea of harmonizing the sea voyage with Kumar’s ludicrous numerology somewhat reflects Glissant’s theory of Relation which ‘necessitates a dialogue between the erratic and the localised, a dialogue which is articulated by the notion of chaos as a dynamic system that refuses to negate the particular just as it valorises the unpredictable or erratic’ (in Coates, 274-5). In other words, two elements that are seemingly disconnected are connected by a chaotic energy that strings together the disparate through a holistic susceptibility. The particular and the general, the localised and the erratic, ie, the sea voyage and the ‘numerical rule’, are interlinked through a most unlikely discourse. Nothing is assumed and nothing is subsumed.

The next aquatic moment happens at the very end of the novel when the

division between Rohini and Vidia has been made. After her sexual engagement with Gladstone, the conception and abortion of their baby, the dissipation of the coolie couple's life in Guyana begins. The pivot of Rohini's anger and disappointment is manifested through the blame that she places on Vidia: "Is Vidia recruit me...is Vidia ruin me"(174). She turns Vidia into the recruiter himself and she begins to assume the role of the elder of the village in India who chases the recruiter away: "Gwan, gwan swine-keeper" (174). Subsequently, Vidia declares: "I leave next week" (174). Her non-reaction compels Miriam to comfort Vidia with 'story, of how, as soon as Rohini head ease, I will beg passage and put her on boat to India myself...He depart from my yard believing in God again. I give him strength to cross water' (175). Through deception, for Miriam's intentions are hardly pure as her desperation to place Rohini on another sea voyage is incited by their rivalry for Gladstone's sexual preference and therefore position of 'power', Miriam sends Vidia off in peace, with him believing in his wife's approaching voyage. But Rohini does not and cannot leave. All she is able to do is to prepare items for his journey, which she begins to do after 'seven days pass'(175). The heptamorous association is once again convened for the second voyage, which is also the voyage 'home'. But 'home' becomes a problematic concept for Vidia because the event of migration would have ruptured the once static notion of his village in India. Simultaneously, he remained an outsider in Guyana, not truly achieving any degree of integration or interaction with other coolies or ex-slaves. His preoccupation with accumulating wealth segregated him from the rest, and ultimately, even from his wife. Thus, it is apt that his death occurs on the oceanic site, for that is where his new notion of home truly lies. Images of this site are summoned as a precursory ceremony to the creative destruction of Vidia's coolie identity and corporeal body:

Masts and sails. Paint freshly put on, deck prepare in tar. Demerara mud give way to a free green ocean and for weeks he speed safe till the wind come in hot and stifling and the sky thicken with the colour of cochineal. Rain and hail and the top-sail adrift, tear away and fly into the darkness, sucking the rigging after it. The coolies shriek, the sailors haul useless ropes, the captain hoarse with orders which carry to nobody. Afterwards they bring the dead up to top-deck, count them, list them in a book, hand them over to woman to wash the stains and wrap in bed sheet. Coolies wail out of duty, the priest warm to his own chanting, then roll the bodies overboard, Vidia and all. No more digging. He can't make hole in water. He done (176).

The destruction that transpires is of course the literal devastation of his body in death, but the creativity associated with it are the tidalectic connotations that seem inseparable from Vidia's fresh identity, which is destroyed and re-formed within the dynamics of the sea. As Dirole writes, 'to go down into the water...is to change space' (in Mary Jones, 2006). In other words, contact with the water beneath its surface, where true exploration begins, starts a reformation of space which ultimately shifts forms and reinvents identity. When Gilroy refers to the 'movement of key cultural and political artefacts' such as 'tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs' (4) as an attempt to capture stories of the slaves' past, he is highlighting the symbols that become important signifiers in the process of Transatlantic slavery, ones that call up uncanny instances that expose the workings of memory, and act as 'diminutives' because they evoke considerations of 'what might be possible'. They also recall the historical moment purely through images which are then capable of being transformed into a distinctive language for this very historical moment. Thus, the 'masts', 'sails', 'deck', 'green ocean', 'wind', 'rain', 'hail', 'sailors', 'ropes', 'captain' and 'water' are tidalectic points of reference in the coolie voyage. They regenerate the coolie story through maritime images that soon become familiar sources of re-membrance.

While Vidia is linked with these symbols, Rohini fabricates her own in response to Vidia's second voyage. After seven days, 'Rohini like she smell saltwater because

she busy herself for the journey' (175). As previously mentioned, '7' is called upon again as a familiar symbol for the sea journey which also stands for the different migrational aspirations of the departing coolies. Rohini prepares a parcel for Vidia which consists of smoked fish, sada-roti and coconut oil. One is reminded of the parcels that represented various dimensions of the process of coolie indentureship in the novel's prologue. The new parcel is filled with items that should physically sustain him while also signifying her last wifely gesture. The other final parcels that she constructs are described by Miriam as 'mad-people parcels' (177) because they have no apparent receiver and contain items such as 'goat dung, papaya skin, tamarind leaf, gurmit seed, and pieces of bone she swear is wild boar' (177). All the objects reflect Rohini and Vidia's past in India, elements in Rohini's memory that she chooses to manifest as 'migrational materials' that seem inseparable from the implications of 'marital materials' for those were the items that somewhat characterised the early stages of their life as a couple. Furthermore, she writes different male names on each parcel, 'Kissoon, Reya, Cheddi, Gopaul, Romesh, Harilall, Balgobin...all the babies she promise Vidia, the one baby she nearly bear for Gladstone' (177). Each name becomes an image for the failure of their fertility and sexual compatibility, as well as the possible coolies who braved the *kala pani* to begin a new albeit uncertain life in the Caribbean.

A less overt instance of the novel's interpretation of the 'liquidity' of coolie experience is the sexual palimpsest that is aligned with the racial rivalry between the Blacks and the Indians. Sex and sexuality become crucial subjects in the web of colonial desire and exploitation for as the editors of *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* state, 'sexuality has to be addressed as an always active social strategy of locating, controlling as well as mobilizing people, and as an all-important, not

necessarily obvious, cultural practice' (Hoving *et al.*).

The metaphorical voyage 'in' is performed through sexual intercourse, with Gladstone, the white master penetrating the racial and class barrier, materialised in this case by the vagina. His entry, first, into Miriam signifies her most immediate access to whiteness and his possession of blackness. She accepts this ownership because it suggests a transference of his material property to her once he is dead: 'She belonged to Gladstone, together with his punts, his fields, his work gangs...china and cutlery she knew intimately...having cleaned and polished them as if they were her own... "When he dead Gladstone will leave everything for me," she joked' (89). Her statement is made with some degree of earnestness of course for she truly believes in her favoured status as the 'higher servant' which was acquired through sexual engagements with Gladstone. Sex with him is not performed out of pleasure, but desire which is somewhat removed from lust. For the motivation behind her sexual relationship with him is the desire to maintain 'her domestic wages which fed and clothed her brothers' (134-35) and to elevate herself in class, financial and political terms. Kampta's question to her is more rhetorical than one requiring an answer: "'So every time you lie with Gladstone, is England you lying with? When he heave on top of you is a whole country, great and heavy, pressing down on you so you can't escape?'"(135). In other words, her access to some kind of knowledge and even appropriation of England and its white people is through an 'insertion', "'when he put it in'" (135) as Kampta phrases it. Accordingly, he articulates to her, "'you does close your eye and imagine you is white lady riding through mist and meadow and all them other pictures paint on all the tin-cans he give you? You does open and close like how whitewoman does do her umbrella when the fine rain fall then sun come out?'" (135). The sexual act becomes a voyage, a journey into the Other, a Lacanian

construal of desire which places desire as the desire of the Other, that is, becoming the Other by being desired by the Other or in Miriam's case (and later Rohini's too), becoming white by being desired by Gladstone. Of course this never happens and never will happen because the mimetic drive, as Celia Britton puts it, 'can never succeed' (83) and this is what makes it unbearable. She quotes Glissant: "'The mimetic impulse is a kind of insidious violence'" (83). Thus, no matter how much Miriam attempts to em-body the white woman, her 'whiteness' will always be, as Bhabha suggests, 'white, but not quite' (122). But on another level, sex with Gladstone, because it is repulsive to her, 'a middle-age man rising and falling and fanning me with his flab, and he so excited he fart and dribble' (135), is performed for practical reasons. In this instance, she complies with his desires for a piece of ham from England: 'I want but my fucking ham which I fuck for' (136). Numerous reasons converge to elucidate Miriam and Gladstone's sexual activities. On her part, desire, revenge, poverty, power and position fuse to meet his lust, desire, ownership and control.

Thus, when Rohini enters the sexual picture, which also extends to the field of labour for they are both Gladstone's servants, Miriam's station is threatened. For it was Miriam who was the leading servant in the Great House having tended to 'Massa Gladstone' for twenty years. The sexual and racial tension between the ex-slave and the coolie, the Black and the Indian, culminates in Rohini's pregnancy. Miriam feels as though she has lost the battle, that nothing beyond this point could be potentially redemptive: 'When Rohini tell me that she making baby with Gladstone the world stop' (159). The baby symbolises the space of colonial 'contamination' where watery connections are made between the exchange of bodily liquids during sexual intercourse, the fluids of the womb within which the baby lives and the seawater that

enters this communion through its implications of colonial expeditions and the shipping of labour, which have now fused into the space of the foetus. Hence, Gladstone's voyage 'in' to both the Black world and the coolie one, and their simultaneous experience of the voyage subsist along a horizontal line that works as the cross-cultural connection. This sexual correlation will be explicated later on in this chapter under the notion of 'douglarisation'.

iv) The arrival and after

'Jajaajin: Dismembered/ from the edifice of Bhaarat's glory,/ urged in the ocean's savage call,/...I walked in no fear/...But now I am torn asunder/ from the warmth/ of coupled joy:/ become trapped/ in the tricks of cheating fancies,/ lured in the anguish/ of foolish delight' -- Churamanie Bissundyal, "The Arrival" (*They Came in Ships*).

The promise of gold and a Ramayanaesque land became images of hope in the minds of the journeying coolies. The recruiters instilled 'milk-and-honey' myths in the aspirations of their recruits, convincing them of the infallibility of prosperity across the waters. Thus when Miriam reads out old Gladstone's epitaph, Rohini wonders, "' It say Ramayana anywhere? ... Recruiter swear this Plantation is holy place, gold bury everywhere'" (115). Here the myth of El Dorado converges with an Indian quest for betterment and divine solace, bringing into view a conquistadoral impetus for exploitation and accumulation alongside a desperate desire for an elevation of circumstances, both of which simultaneously conflict and complement each other. The initial freedom from familial suffocation which was enjoyed upon arrival in Guyana results in Rohini's verve: 'She spent the first year in Guiana in a state of exhilaration' (68). After all, 'she was nineteen now, a wife with no one to shackle her'(69). The thrill of being no longer bound to the past, where sex with Vidia

now signified the inception of the present life, ‘each novel sensation or manoeuvre marking a further distancing from India and from the past’ (69), is founded on the independence of action, an emancipatory willingness to perform ‘domestic tasks, finding time, too, to work in the manager’s kitchen, bringing in her own small sum of money to add to Vidia’s wages’ (68). Hope was still an adequate sustainer, and the suspension of faith had not yet begun. A fresh immigrant then, Rohini believed in the supposed benevolence of the indentureship system: ‘At the end of five years, when Gladstone would reward him for his service with a free plot of land, he would have accumulated enough to buy wood to build their first home’ (68). Moreover, the shortage of women on the plantation meant that she was in demand and could therefore manipulate Vidia to adhere to *her* desires simply because any deviance from him could result in her consenting to be with another man. The relative liberty that was hers to control became a tool in the power relations between the sexes. A Trinidadian coolie woman in the 1870s stresses her autonomy with regards to sex and relationships: ‘When the last ship came in I took a Papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once’” (in Poynting, 233).

In Vidia’s case life in Guyana begins and ends with the accumulation of coins and the numerical structuring of his time. Thus, even from the commencement of labour and marriage on new land, he ‘counted and re-counted their earnings, organising the coins into separate piles’ (68). Not satisfied merely with his wages, he found extra work, and ‘already he had measured his period of sleep, cutting it down from seven to six to five hours’ (68). All this was done in order to acquire and maintain a considerable amount of wealth, because he believed that ‘if he didn’t, the rest of the gang would earn his share and overtake him in possessions’ (68). His greed

escalates as the years proceed, making him an isolated figure, counting his coins, neglecting his wife so that her sexual relationship with Gladstone is easily upheld: 'He no longer kept a check on her comings and goings from Gladstone's house, contented with the sum of her wages which relieved him of having to spend some of his own money on their upkeep' (129).

Two years prove to be sufficient to alter fabricated notions of Guyana and transgress Rohini and Vidia's marriage. For Rohini, the magic of the recruiter's story soon dissipates amidst blatant realities: 'The recruiter had promised romance, comparing it to the story of Lord Bharrat's journey to Dandaka forest to meet his bride, but in the three long months to Guiana and the two long years following, she met only with the sickness of greed' (70). Gradually, sex with her husband becomes more masochistic; it evolves from the incestuous albeit immature sexual games played between husband, wife and their in-laws to a raucous greed for sex and pleasure, with Rohini making educated attempts at seductive gestures. This then incites suspicion in Vidia, for her efforts appear to have been learnt outside of their marital bed. The accusatory finger is immediately pointed towards the blacks: 'Was she learning from the niggers how to do it in shameless ways, spreading her legs and opening her mouth?' (103). Such racial estimations were formed through the prevalent rivalry of labour between the blacks and the coolies. The divide and rule strategy practised by the plantocracy perpetuated the racial gulf and made it possible for coolies to speculate about the blacks in ways that further separated them so as to generate an illusory hierarchy of circumstances: 'He had overheard the older coolies speaking in appalled tones about Africa, a place of disease, worse than India. The niggers lived there in horribly unmanageable numbers... Diseases arose vengefully from the soil' (103). Through his association with the older coolies, Vidia begins to

form judgments about the Africans which become stale repetitions of preconceived stereotypes. For in truth, his notion of ‘niggers’ could only have been formed in Guyana, having had no previous contact with them, a reason that permits his fearlessness amidst the African spirits. Despite this, he maintains hostility towards them, accusing them of being indolent and uncouth: ‘They were lazy and ignorant people, living only for their bellies and the day; their huts stank of unwashed children’ (75).

But Rohini’s contact with blacks, which occurs through Miriam, is more complex as it involves the intimacy of friendship and the sharing of a sexual partner. Their friendship soon turns into contention as they battle for primacy in Gladstone’s home and bed. The first accusation that Miriam throws at Rohini is the social and economic displacement of the blacks due to the arrival of the coolies: “‘Don’t think I don’t realise that all-you coolie people come to Guiana to enslave we. And everything we build up, all the dams and all the canals we dig and all the cane we plant, you people greed for and conspire to inherit’” (124). Later, when Rohini speaks to an imaginary Gladstone, she orders him to give Miriam up. But Miriam’s place is foremost, being the more senior servant, and having had more years of sexual intercourse with Gladstone. However, this idea shatters when Miriam discovers that Rohini is carrying Gladstone’s baby, the supposed symbol of the globe, or rather the colonised globe manifested in the flesh through imperial lust and sex. Miriam effectively begins the process of aborting the baby because the fear that she might lose her position as Gladstone’s principal servant grips her to the core. Losing her stability at his home means losing the stability of her home. She is careful to consider the implications and consequences of this baby: ‘Gladstone could rightly blame me for tempting him with Rohini, and I get dismiss, and what will happen then to Thomas

them and me?’ (168). Miriam needs to recuperate her place as a black woman, and the only conceivable path towards that, in her mind, is the ridding of the coolies. She becomes enraged, excited, explosive as her desperation to exorcise herself from the coolie presence heightens.

However, symbolically, Miriam and Rohini form a syncretic identity, one that combines biological differences within the space of colonial whiteness, which is represented through Gladstone. This amalgamation is simultaneously cultural and social, fitting into a large mosaic image that places them on equal levels. This notion of African and Indian mixing has been theorized by Shalini Puri under the rubric of ‘dougla poetics’ and is especially relevant in the novel’s context considering that ‘Dougla, referring to the offspring of an Indian/African union, at once speaks about the relationship between Africans and Indians and has the Indian woman at its centre’ (Rampersad). It is a concept that encompasses creolization and coolitude in its emphasis on a complex culture that blends all contributory elements within a social *imaginaire*, and points towards ‘multiple identities in a dynamic interaction, in a “dialectic of mutations”’ (Carter, Torabully, 172). While ‘dougla’ refers to a biological concept, Puri has extended its connotations to accommodate a metaphorical inference. Removing it from its biological essentialism means that it is able to include elements that are not strictly African or Indian into its construction. While creolization has hitherto been accused of Afrocentrism, douglarisation offers a dissipation of this African centre and a merging of the two primary cultures of the Caribbean. Grant Stoddard and Eve Cornwall write in reference to douglarisation’s pertinence in highlighting cross-cultural awareness and inevitability:

“‘douglarisation’... can be read as a form of creolization, but as a form of creolization in its most general and inclusive sense which decentres the African origins of Creole

culture and foregrounds the ongoing syncretic process of cultural formation. It also highlights the power struggles inherent in those processes. It makes clear the intense relationships which cut across cultural mixing, relationships of exclusivity, identification, openness to change, social mobility, multicultural nationhood, cultural preservation and more' (in Mehta, 91). In other words, it manages to support the chaos of cultures and the movement of relationships within its ongoing open structure. Thus, in Miriam and Rohini's case, their connection through Gladstone which is forged of course through the factors of sex, empire, desire, enmity and power accentuates the cross-culturalism that foundationalises communication within the Caribbean. African, European and Indian pieces of the social mosaic that interplay through various means seep through history into the present-day. It is therefore relevant that Vidia's contact with the nigger spirits of the land somewhat fosters a more valuable understanding of the meaning of the slaves' contribution prior to the arrival of the coolies. The restless slave-souls articulate the destitution that comes with the colonial system. Thus when Vidia 'squatted under the branches, sharing the space with its nigger spirits with whom he was now familiar' (101), he absorbs the rhythm of the dead, their rage and confusion, 'dreaming of their villages in Africa' (102), and he sees the correlation between them and the 'living nigger work gangs' (102). The past and the present are bound by a spiritual link that attempts to intertwine the races through a historical convergence, that is, the mutuality of their subjugation to the powers of the empire.

If Vidia's proximity to the slave ghosts of the past explicates the process of temporal and cultural intermixing, then Kampta embodies this process. A coolie of Madrasi descent whose 'dark skin...and tightly curled hair' suggest a 'Negroid appearance' (91), he is positioned on the boundary between African and Indian, a

physical, cultural and social example of douglarisation. Furthermore he ventures into the bush to live with the Amerindians, a symbol of his openness to embracing the formation of racial composites, identifying not simply with the coolies and the slaves but with the original people of the land as well. Unlike the other coolies he understands the sensitivity of the history of slave labour in the colony and views the stream of industry in its chronological context: 'A handful of coolies would die, but it is time coolie learn what nigger gone through. Coolie come here thinking the bush clear by itself and nobody plant the fields and miracle dig the canals, but miracle is nigger, and all the canal-water pool together is one drop compared to all the nigger sweat' (139). His relationship with Miriam augments his dougla inclinations and presents him as a complex character, one who perhaps represents the future 'dougla', 'creolised' or 'coolitude' man. He does belong to the future indeed, for in the epilogue we are informed that 'Kampta never existed' (179), thus indicating the inability for him to exist in such a time. His formation can only occur after the recuperation and forging of histories, and once creolisation has managed to merge the African and the Indian without dissolving their respective identities.

b) *Our Lady of Demerara*

'The state of exile is also the state of rupture of old paradigms, of lost selves, and new affiliations, the locus of emergent self-discovery' –(Cameron McCarthy, "The Palace of the Peacock: Wilson Harris and the Curriculum in Troubled Times").

i) The text's motivations

If *The Counting House* self-consciously promotes historical views with the intention of highlighting the coolie's place, then *Our Lady of Demerara* self-consciously denies this right in its concern with the *place* of indentureship as a historical event and coolies as subjects of this event in the context of the wider world and in *relation* to other elements. Its philosophy echoes the great Caribbean theorists, Wilson Harris, Edouard Glissant and Antonio Benitez-Rojo, who explicate the chaotic, detour-ridden, paradoxical and asymmetrical inclinations of Caribbean society that cannot simply adhere to static groupings, racial or otherwise. In this sense, it is more than anything else a Caribbean novel, as it recognises the fragmentation, instability, isolation, uprootedness and cultural heterogeneity of Guyana. By delving both in form and content into pre-Columbian beliefs and Hindu notions of reincarnation, which suggest continual rehearsals, the novel is highlighting at once the link between Aboriginal faith and the faith of the migrants, and pointing towards a revisionary method while highlighting spiritual connections in the space of the colonial web. Thus the novel is performing the details of coolitude, by promoting opacity which refuses an easy classification of social elements, through an understanding that coolies remain referents among other social referents, in the

construction of mosaicism, and as part of the complex of colonial relations.

The polarisation of faith and place which occurs in the novel through the mobilisation of spiritual beliefs and physical life, opens up new spaces that are not only regenerative but redemptive. Importation of religion in the Caribbean suggests isolation from the material environment but the combination of faiths, both colonialist and indigenous, intertwined with the natural world, results in sentiments of hope, thus indicating that the novel is not only exposing the nature of Caribbean life in its cultural, religious, spiritual and natural dimensions, but also defining the restitutive potential in the Guyanese environment, which becomes especially evident in the dense interior of the country. The kaleidoscope of spirituality that binds space and non-space promotes the non-reductionist spatial linkage in the novel's 'continuum of cross-cultural womb of space' (Harris, 7).

In effect the mobilisation of fragments occurs. It is largely a result of the polarisation of faith and place: geographical connections are made through space dispersals and re-connections, where personalities and identities associated with land and place are reversed, replayed and rediscovered, thus alluding to the ceaselessness of identity, its constant deferral. These fragments of moments and personalities suggest the structure of mosaicism in the colonial web of the novel, involving places of Dabydeen's own diasporan identity (Guyana, India, England).

The novel exemplifies the second facet of coolitude's tenets, which attempts to release itself from a bondage to India. The initial stages of coolitude emphasise a reliving of the voyage across the *kala pani*, an assessment of the poetics of migration and a restitution of the space of the 'Fall'. The second half of coolitude's agenda, however, insists on the relation of coolies to 'otherness' and the way in which plural societies formulate themselves and build up notions of interaction and relationality.

Torabully states that ‘coolitude as a living process shows that, while adhering to Indianity as a major set of references, one should also put this in contact with other visions of the world...this implies that the attitude to identity can no longer be thought of alongside the narrow visions of atavistic desires’ (194). Thus, coolitude has to leave its first stage for the climax or the end result of its poetics, which is the inclusion of the rest of society into its celebration and renewal of the coolie. Torabully explains that the way in which this can be done is to address and expose the opacities in post-plantocratic societies, which he has placed under the rubric of ‘baroque poetics’. The pragmatism of the colonial system of labour disallowed the proliferation and chaos of differences to be acknowledged, hence he states that ‘baroquism, by its “impure”, multiple, mosaic consistence, enables [the] coexistence of opacities’ (174). The notions of ‘impurities’, chaos and opacities appear in the discourse of several Caribbean theorists as well, namely Benitez-Rojo, Glissant and Harris. Thus, *Our Lady of Demerara* also has to be read within the theoretical context to which it belongs where such ideas are central to its foundations. The importance of applying coolitude to the novel is, firstly, because it *is* a coolitude text, and secondly, because it discloses the distinction between itself and *The Counting House* which comments not only on Dabydeen’s changed approach to the perception of race and history, but also on the way in which coolitude is both a refiguration of the coolie (as seen in *The Counting House*) and a departure from an obsession with the coolie in order to conceive the bigger picture of society and the world (as we will see occurs in *Our Lady of Demerara*).

In view of the coolitude baroquism of the novel which involves issues such as chaos, repetitions, rehearsals and renewals, various themes overlap so as to create a constant intermingling where few clear-cut separations are able to be made.

Fragments are often treated holistically and several notions form the essence of the novel so that they are able to appear under different headings. Therefore, themes such as ‘reincarnations’ and ‘cross-culturalities’, ‘rhythm’ and ‘chaos’ repeat themselves in the present study, indicating their centrality to the novel’s philosophy.

ii) Rhythm and Chaos

Benitez-Rojo’s advice for reading Fernando Ortiz’s essay ‘Contrapunteo’ is applicable to *Our Lady of Demerara* as well because the spirit behind both texts, which is very Caribbean in nature, seems unitary: ‘read it as a dialogic and uncentred text, in whose plurality of voices and rhythms the most varied disciplines and the most irreconcilable ideologies come forward along with enunciations that correspond to two very different forms of understanding, of knowing’ (158). The notion of knowledge is interrogated at this point because any secure definition becomes problematic in the context of a specifically Caribbean interpretation of what constitutes the realm of knowing and of understanding. When Jacques Lyotard defines two kinds of knowledge as being ‘scientific’ and ‘narrative’, Benitez-Rojo associates the latter type of knowledge with societies that are ‘underdeveloped in the epistemological, theoretical, technological, industrial, imperialist, etc. senses’ (167). In short, it belongs to ‘Peoples of the Sea’, or those who define themselves through maritime associations implicit with a distinct rhythm.

This rhythm, in a Caribbean context, is a polyrhythm, typified, as Benitez-Rojo states, by the ‘presence of several rhythmic sources: Indoamerica, Africa, Asia, and Europe’ (25). He makes a distinction between the white rhythms which ‘articulate

themselves in a binary fashion' (26) and the 'copper, black, and yellow rhythms' (26) which belong to 'Peoples of the Sea' and are characterized as 'turbulent and erratic, [appearing] as eruptions of gases and lava that issue from an elemental stratum, still in formation; in this respect they are rhythms without a past, or better, rhythms whose past is in the present, and they legitimize themselves by themselves' (26). This division of meaning does not separate the two rhythms, for they work within the same rhythmic system, one that is essentially a *mestizaje* which produces a space that is not a synthesis of differences but an insoluble meeting of divergences. Thus, Benitez-Rojo defines the Caribbean novel as a *mestizo* text with layers of texts inbuilt within its general structure, resembling the nature of Caribbean society which he describes as 'an unpredictable society that originated in the most violent currents and eddies of modern history where sexual and class differences are overlaid with differences of an ethnographic nature' (27). Effectively, such a society is chaotic by nature, continually undetermined with interchangeable elements perpetuating the dynamics of human relation.

However, despite the apparent anarchy of those social complexities, there remain 'constants', or in the language of Chaos Theory, 'strange attractors' which indicate regularities within supposed disorder. Benitez-Rojo's reading of Caribbean life in the context of Chaos Theory is done through the conviction that 'Caribbeanness' is a social and not a cultural construct formed by its own peculiar rhythm, and within which differences in the Caribbean coexist 'in the forms of the ritual sacrifice and directed toward all of the senses [and this gives] pan-Caribbean cultures a way of being, a style that is repeated through time and space in all its differences and variants' (79-80). This repetition, allegorised with the principle of entropy in Chaos discourse, eventuates a difference at every point of recurrence, and

brings forth various points of energy at various times, so that some dimension is always highlighted without exclusion or prejudice. Resembling Benitez-Rojo's formulations is coolitude's notion of 'spotlighting', which brings to the forefront previously neglected elements in a cyclical fashion thus producing a continual reverberation that never tires. Benitez-Rojo analogises this repetition rooted in chaos to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way 'that sketches in an "other" shape that keeps changing, with some objects born to light while others disappear into the womb of darkness; change, transit, return, fluxes of sidereal matter' (6). Furthermore, the Antilles physically correlates to its metaphorical inferences of chaos, bridging ' "in a certain way", South and North America, that is, a machine of spume that links the narrative search for El Dorado with the narrative of the finding of El Dorado; or if you like, the discourse of myth with the discourse of history; or even, the discourse of resistance with the language of power' (Benitez-Rojo, 4). Thus, its geographical functions enter into its cultural, historical and mythical discourse, presenting what Wilson Harris has called a cosmic space-time which contains, as Marina Camboni writes, the 'spiritual legacy of historical pasts and the potential of the new, alive with the regenerative energy of the physical universe' (14). Time becomes infinite where dialogic communication between disparate points in space and time occurs and reoccurs in a process of infinite rehearsal.

iii) Place, Space and Faith

In view of the preceding definitions and considerations, *Our Lady of Demerara*²⁰ is an explicitly *mestizo* text. In other words, it is from beginning to end a Caribbean novel, promoting and embodying at the same time the rhythm of the 'Peoples of the Sea' to display the way in which Caribbean society is and operates. Its form and context are carefully woven together to propound the chaos of Guyanese life with its implications of place, landscape, people, vegetation, its beasts and myths. And the novel appears to create, or rather, re-create the 'great Caribbean machine', a reinvention of the Sugar Machine to accommodate the fractal existence caused by colonialism. In the body of this machine is the convergence of what Benitez-Rojo describes as 'cosmogonies, mythic bestiaries, remote pharmacopoeias, oracles, profound ceremonies, and the mysteries and alchemies of antiquity' (17). Self-consciously positioning itself at the borderline between myth and history, *Our Lady* invites the reinvention of time, where it attempts to fuse the freshness of the living moment with notions of belief and the past through 'The Infinite Rehearsal'- Wilson Harris' concept which is mentioned at the very start of the novel along with quotations by historical figures about Amerindian and Hindu faith, thus alluding to the restitution of history through spiritual remembrance. However, it is not simply a recovery of history that is evident in the novel. In fact, history becomes less important as the text progresses. What becomes more pronounced is the life of the landscape, the correspondence between myth and place, word and flesh. The landscape, Derek Walcott states in his Nobel Lecture, contains history's memory: 'It is there in

²⁰ Hereafter referred to as *Our Lady*.

Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians...are still serving time' ("The Antilles", 81). Thus, because history is already embedded in the natural world, it is this natural world, which freshly exists in the present moment, that needs to be considered and understood. Instead of 'evocations', he asks, 'why not "celebrations of real presences"?' ("The Antilles", 68). The real presences signify the reality of a place and its people, its natural life, architecture, villages and so on.

Therefore, in *Our Lady*, when Lance arrives in Guyana hoping to conduct an historical excavation of the Priest's life, it is the physicality of the city that first strikes him with its 'bombast of signs' and which then leads him to believe that the 'National Archive promised much, if one believed the hugeness of the signboard announcing its existence' (76). Of course the historical documentations of the Archive paled in comparison to the building's tangible presence. The reason for this is simple, as Manu explains to Lance: "'You can't blame we. We too shame to re-member and when we do, we just feel guilt and anger'" (78). This historical humiliation is obliterated by the struggle to live and survive: 'People were too occupied with the immediate grind of living to contemplate the past, much less preserve its records' (78). Survival, which stems from the desperation that poverty induces, is what typifies the cities of the Antilles, says Walcott, and what makes history or the recording of history, negligible. He writes in his essay "The Caribbean: Culture of Mimicry?", 'in the Caribbean, history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered. What has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of

the races, what has become necessary is imagination as necessity, as invention' (in Hamner, 53). Besides, ghosts of the past have already formed part of the present. In the novel, references to the Amazonian jungle are filled with historical inferences. It was where, we are told, Walter Raleigh went in search of 'the fabled city of gold and its great chieftain El Dorado' (77). In subsequent years, many foreign adventurers followed in his footsteps, dying from 'disease or hostile native arrow' (77), indicating the conflict of culture, race and environment. Hence, 'the jungle interior of the country was littered with the bones of foreigners' (77). The question of place and its relation to its inhabitants becomes important as is the interconnection between the people within the geometrical foundations of place. The jungle, with its proliferation of life and lack of discrimination for its victims, visitors or denizens, compels Manu to inform Lance that ' " All-body here is foul, we is one spirit, no high or low, top or down, all is thief or abductor or bugger-man"' (79). In other words, the interior of the country, with its ambiguity, sinister density and cornucopia of organisms, living or dead, equalizes everything and everyone and becomes a place suitable for the birth and perpetuation of cross-culturalities.

Cross-culturalities, defined by Harris as necessarily different from the notion of the 'alter-ego' (which indicates a split rather than an overlap), is particularly suited to the history of South America, which is, he insists, a history that is never final and never locatable in 'a single linearity' (in Fazzini, 57). This trait eventuates from the fact that numerous expeditions into the hostile interiors of the South American landscape have been made, some with knowledge of their outcome and others with a mysterious absence or disappearance of bodies and people, thus creating a constant possibility of re-enactment and reinvention of those adventures. This is why, he says in an interview with Marina Camboni and Marco Fazzini, the character Donne in his

novel *Palace of the Peacock*, dies three deaths because ‘you have to look at Donne, you have to bring Donne back, you have to see Donne as not a finished creature. He appears to have been finished and yet he animates the thing afresh...each death may imply a different journey, a different possibility in terms of his life. So, there is an unfinished aspect to Donne’s life which allows us to look beyond Donne, to look through Donne into a future that we cannot locate exactly, yet it bears on the language, it bears on our language, it animates our language, it opens up all sorts of possibilities which are not static. You can see composite realities at work’ (*Resisting Alterities*, 57-8).

It is this very ‘unfinished aspect’ that *Our Lady* puts forth in its approach to perceiving the Guyanese condition, both in its natural and human life. The existence of spirits within the soil and the waters of the jungle implies the ceaselessness of life, the continual engagement between the living and the dead as well as a blurring of this distinction when the spirits, supposedly properties of the dead, perform functions of the living, as Manu once again informs Lance: ‘ “ The river full of jumbie from the past which suddenly appear and shine in the mud like silver fish, sunlight flick off the glass so they look as if they living” ’ (87). The jungle then is a place that combines, adds and fuses, incapable of negation or subterfuge. In this sense, it is a positive space that accepts rather than rejects, despite its violent history of excavation and murder. In fact, it is the very viciousness of the past that gathers in the natural environment, to form a composite reality that undermines temporal sequence. The harrowing aspect of the past re-forms itself through the present reality of the river ‘ “ when tide low all kinda tings does wash up, as if the riverbed convulse and cough up what does choke it. Sometimes knives and guns, sometimes pieces of chain wrapped round bones, and

when you put them together you get a picture of long-time Negro slave people breaking chain and running away from plantation, and whiteman chasing them all the way in the bush, but when whiteman go to catch them, they jump into the river and prefer to drown''' (86). Voices of the past, which include that of the Negro, the white plantation owners, as well as the 'Dutch soldier, Spanish soldier, English soldier' (87), resurface on the waters of the river to consolidate the interconnectedness of these racial and cultural aspects of present Guyanese life from which the memory of the past cannot be extricated, because this past within which death is a prominent feature where 'wars, plunder, slave rebellions, coolie riots' (95) typify its nature, is not quite the past, but a living reality tied to the 'living landscape', another Harrisian notion.

The 'living landscape' suggests that the interior life which includes the life of the landscape, the riverscape and the skyscape, is integral to the reality of place. This interior life is not passive, instead it bubbles with resonance and possesses its own pre-discursive language, one that Harris equates to an open book which is to be read with an inner eye. Its language moves beyond the purely textual to accommodate music and silence as well, performed by its implicit orchestra, 'when consciousness sings through variegated fabrics and alternations of mood, consonance as well as dissonance, unfathomable age and youth, unfathomable kinships' (Harris, 44) to create linkages beyond the issue of linearity or logic. Hence, Manu's description of the Arawakian belief in sudden changes, or leaps in one's condition, from one form to the other, without a supposedly rational explanation for this metamorphosis, ties in with the idea of the 'unfathomability' that the living landscape produces: ' " Arawak people different from we—they believe in gods who can change you when you still living, not bothering to wait until you die. One moment you are a man planting your

cassava quietly, when badam-bam-bam! Arawak gods send a spirit...turn you into a howler-monkey''' (106). It is this notion of the extra-human interfering with human life that creates the mystery of place, an indefinable aura surrounding its apparent tangibility which then crosses binaric formations in order to emphasise the existence of cross-culturalities. Hence, as Lance contemplates, Christian dichotomies such as Man/God, Son/Father, Whore/Virgin, Flesh/Word, Earth/Heaven and Sin/Salvation, cannot have meaning in Aboriginal faith, and consequently in the lives of those who reside within that Aboriginal context for as Harris writes in his essay "Letter from Francisco Bone to W.H.", 'the mixed people of African or Indian or European or Chinese descent who live in modern Guyana today are related to the Aboriginal ghosts of the past' (50). This is a strongly coolitude ethic in its correlation of all racial elements, thereby creating composite identities rather than ones entrenched in the rigidity of roots. Torabully highlights that 'one of the aims of coolitude is...to foster a larger community of vision encompassing the experiences of people of African descent and fostering interaction with later immigrant groups...[such as the] coolies' (143). And to push this point of African/Indian intermingling further by reconsidering the influence of Aboriginal existence on every aspect of modern Guyanese life is to attempt the creation of a 'whole', or rather the piecing together of fragments to recreate the 'whole'. Walcott's analogy of this process to the gluing together of a broken vase, where the vestige of the cracks has more meaning and love than when the vase was whole, indicates the labour of reconstruction and the creative energy associated with it. ("The Antilles", 69).

Furthermore, on the subject of faith, the echoes of Hindu notions of reincarnation with the Arawakian concept of rebirth, conjoin these communities in their refusal of Western either/or paradigms, for as Manu states, ' " nothing ever dead-

dead for true’” (91), hence indicating the cyclical nature of things as well as an idea of time that conflicts with the Western one. Torabully suggests that the reason for writing *Cale d'Etoiles* in a cyclical fashion was because ‘its cyclical aspect echoes the cyclical vision Oriental peoples have of time and history’ (157). The crucial consideration of this temporal uniqueness is centred on the physical environment, for it is only then, when faith and the landscape fuse and complement one another that the process of restitution can begin and succeed. For the importation of religion in the Caribbean, particularly Christianity, which clashed not only with Aboriginal spiritual life, but also that of its immigrants, culminated, as Victoria Carchidi writes, ‘in an alienation from the physical life of the Caribbean’ (182). The Priest’s attempt to instil Christian rationality in the lives of the Arawaks, Africans and Indians, would have simply led to confusion. As he gradually absorbs the essence of the Guyanese interior, Lance begins to understand the futility of the Priest’s missionary work, believing that ‘nothing he said would have made sense to them’ (107), because the apertures of faith between the cultures were too great. Spirituality had to be directly connected to lived experience and not to doctrines invented in places and times disjointed from the present moment. Any attempt to force a borrowed spirituality onto a race or a culture that could not possibly relate to it, would result in the appearance of ‘lacunae...in which new spiritual practices begin to emerge, practices that draw syncretically not only on established European religious traditions but also on African and other cultural beliefs’ (Carchidi, 182). Thus, the Priest’s efforts have to be rewritten, his doctrine of faith reconsidered, this time with the very syncretic outlook that it once denied. Part II of the novel is this retextualisation of spirituality, while the novel as a whole is a comment on the necessity of this rewriting, with its division into two sections, the first written in a social realist mode, the latter in the fragmented and

chaotic fashion of Arawakian/Hindu belief systems, explicitly drawing a line between the two sections to indicate the clash of spiritualities.

However, as the title of the novel indicates, the entire text is a fusion of spiritual systems rather than a purely postcolonial resistance to cultural and historical imposition, where 'Our Lady' both signifies the Virgin Mary of Christianity and the Great Arawak Mother of Aboriginal belief, thus creating an ambiguity to her identity, and her residence in Demerara points to the specificity of the novel's intentions: to display the spiritual origination of Guyana through religious dialogue. In this way, she is the psychical space of redemption, one of the poetic spaces under which El Dorado or Utopia are also categorised. In this space, as Benitez-Rojo states, 'antagonisms that separate Self from Other must be reconciled' (193), for these are the very colonial ideologies that have to be confronted and consequently dissolved—ideologies that have perpetuated the division between subject and object which are based on the type of binary distinctions that Lance considers to be useless in the Guyanese context. The true quest then, is not the actual expedition into the jungle's interior or into a material El Dorado, but involves a metaphorical 'leap beyond', as Fazzini has termed it, where the physical and the psychical are considered simultaneously, creating an experience close to a spiritual revelation. This 'leap beyond', the novel seems to advocate, can only be done through a proper lens. For perception through the wrong lens creates a wall between the pre-leap and post-leap spaces. This is why, Lance states, Father Jenkins could not communicate with the Arawaks: 'He had looked at life through his lens, with superficial eyes' (109). And Lance's success at rewriting the Priest's manuscript is attributed to Samaroo who gave him not only the manuscript but 'a Hindu lens through which to read it' (112-13) which 'offered glimpses into the processes of regenerating one's self, of being born anew and in multiplicity...fissure,

crack, abortion and rupture took place in one's lifetime, but from these could emerge utterly different redemptive conceptions of one's self' (111). It is this Hindu lens that aids Lance's understanding of the magic of the Arawaks, thus creating a palimpsest of faiths from which to view the entirety of society. The novel's analogy of this layering which resembles Walcott's 'vase analogy' is to that of the gluing of fragments of an eggshell without hiding its cracks. Father Harris tells the narrator ' " Always leave a memory of the original...the memory of the original only comes when you see the breakage"' (159), thus suggesting that nothing of the past can ever be covered or ignored, that even as one celebrates the Great Arawak Mother, one has to also acknowledge the Virgin Mary, Kali, Kuan Yin and other female religious figures within the collective of Guyanese society. It is apt then for Lance, as an abuser of women and as a motherless Englishman to be the one on this journey of rediscovering the 'Mother', the spiritualities of a place so geographically remote from him yet historically proximate, in order to piece together the fragments of a broken connection between Britain and her colonies which was once only typified by cultural and economic colonialism, without the lateral historical implications of imperialism. For every element in this phenomenon forms a web where the former contributes to the latter's structure. Lance, then, symbolises the importance of not only reassessing the culture of the colonised but that of the coloniser as well, where a mirroring of influences exposes the inseparability of cultures which then leads to the necessity of seeing these cultures, formed out of histories, as subject to perpetual reassessment because their constant movement implies constant possibilities.

iv) The Infinite Rehearsal

The novel introduces a suitable metaphor for this interconnectedness where one is able to deduce the continual revisitation of history. The eggs that Lance's mother in Part II miraculously receives to feed her son symbolize, through their spherical shape, Harris' 'unfinished genesis of the imagination' which refers to the incompleteness of history and the interplay of elements within a globular structure. The sphere is the archetypal shape whose centre resists direct perception and whose roundness displays qualities of indeterminacy where overlapping and interpenetration occur. Thus it provides indeterminate solutions and possibilities, and is the space where binaries collapse. The whore and the virgin meet in the figure of Lance's mother, declared by him to be the former but her almost biblical dedication to her son brings her closer to the virgin. Hence even as she is already a rehearsal of Beth in Part I, she perpetuates the mobility of her personality by making the separation of qualities impossible, thereby creating possibilities. This reincarnation also alludes to a racial reconfiguration, with Beth in Part I in denial of being quarter Indian, but in Part II made to accept the challenges of interfusion.

While the novel does not explicitly comment on the ideal conduct of race relations, it does so in an implicit way, often through poetic or metaphorical means so as to avoid any dogmatic inclinations concerning the issue. Thus, rather than preach integration, it displays it. A clear example of this is in the multiracial Arawak family that Lance encounters in the jungle, which once again alludes to the jungle as a space of redemption and fusion. The Arawak woman's children 'were all slightly different in appearance. There were hints, in the shapes of their noses, in the texture of their hair, in the various tints of their skin, of a history of cross-breeding. Hindus, Africans

and even the odd Chinese...What was remarkable was the seeming harmony of this mongrel community' (104-05). They represent the composite identity that Harris, Benitez-Rojo and Torabully speak of as being crucial in the Caribbean make-up, although they most often refer to it in cultural rather than biological terms. Torabully states that 'the composite identity is assumed there to be a root conjoined with another root (the root of the other), without a predatory or central root, thus leaving identity open to *la relation* or the fact of bringing into the relation another component' (152), and this is the very identity that coolitude puts forth in its poetics. As it first propounds an acknowledgement of the coolie, his migration, voyage, trials and tribulations (which, as we have discovered, *The Counting House* deals with), it ultimately insists on the relationality of fragments, its creolization rather than essentialization. In other words, 'coolitude attempts to break away from the danger in constructing a rhizome-identity based on *one* interpretation or *one* component...it points towards multiple identities in a dynamic interaction, in a "dialectic of mutations"' (172), which then creates the image of the bastard through promiscuous interplay. *Our Lady's* obsession with whores, prostitutes, out of wedlock pregnancies and abortions alludes to its acceptance of this promiscuity as part and parcel of the process of, as Torabully puts it, 'cross-cultural vagabondage' (194).

This cross-culturalism, however, does not remain spatially contained within Guyana. Part I of *Our Lady* exists to provide a cultural cartography of Part II, which involves Coventry, Ireland, India and finally Guyana, where all four meet in dialogue. This mongrel web is materialized through the rehearsals of personalities in Lance's rewritten manuscript. Coventry characters are reinvented through the Arawakian and Hindu scope of reincarnation discussed earlier in order to draw the type of connections necessary for the configuration of cross-culturalities. Thus, characters

such as Rohini/Corrine, Miriam, Geoff, Lance and Beth replay themselves, with elements added to their identities to indicate the ceaselessness of identity construction, another crucial point in coolitude's aesthetics. Of course this ceaselessness relates back to the notion of the composite identity wherein several elements amalgamate and the ability for these components to vary causes this identity to continually change, thereby creating a sense of continuity despite the ongoing alterations in composition. This incessancy, which is not subjected to time although time remains a factor within its process, resembles the taxonomical classification propounded by Michel Foucault through pre-Darwinian evolutionists such as Bonnet, Maupertuis, Diderot, Robinet and Benoit de Maillet. Rather than a succession of beings, where one overtakes another, these organisms survive in interdependency through a common journey 'towards the perfection of God' (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 151). Thus, this 'evolutionism' is not based on an individual selfishness, but 'is a way of generalizing the principle of continuity and the law that requires that all beings form an uninterrupted expanse' (152). In other words, time and space form a continuity that creates an infinity whose ultimate goal is the perfection of the entirety, in this case, the entirety of beings on the taxonomical table, and in the case of the novel, the entirety of the characters, their countries, races, cultures and societies within the connective web mentioned earlier whose function resembles that of the taxonomical table of the natural world.

Another aspect of 'evolutionism' negates any kind of temporality in order to 'reveal, one after the other, the squares that, when viewed together, will form the continuous network of the species' (152), which again harks back to the notion of an endless relation between beings. Resemblances between seemingly far-fetched organisms indicate how taxonomia works: these partial identities are the marks

‘revealed in the present, of one and the same living being, persisting through all the upheavals of nature and thereby filling all vacant possibilities offered by the taxonomic table’ (152-3). Thus, as Benoit de Maillet states, the resemblance between the wings of a bird and the fins of a fish exists because birds once belonged to ‘the original waters of the earth’ (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 153), and therefore, like Father Harris’s advice to the young Priest, the memory of the original remains somewhat intact. And it is Father Harris who states, mirroring Maillet’s formulation on the interconnectedness of beings, that ‘ “all are bound together in *one* process of living, immeasurably various as it is” ’ (216). Immediately after this declaration, he begins to re-member the conjoining of the bones of Stephen Yardley, Mark Yardley, Christopher Reece and John Taylor who were ‘on the surface different men but identical in the foundation of an earthen grave’ (216), a thought that calls up not only the notion of intertwining characters, but also the aforementioned bones of the foreigners in the jungle whose presence feeds into and affects the lives of the living in one chain of osmosis-like exchange. Rehearsals then, are not trite repetitions, but a dialogue between selves on the taxonomical table, always readjusting positions, always incomplete in Father Harris’ ‘*one* process of living’. Despite the continuity of this process, its movements are not categorically logical, consisting as it does of innumerable particles, ‘miscarried differences’ (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 154) and variations so that combinations become complex and the ways in which elements combine are varied and unpredictable and this then denies a linear explanation of continuity. Hence Father Harris asks, ‘ “Why should we always want things to follow, a, b, c, why always want things to make sense, to make a sequel and a finished story?” ’ (214). His rhetorical question outlines the novel’s philosophy of leaps and chaos, rehearsals and reincarnations, but with a firm belief in the fundamental

connectivity of these seemingly disparate events and characters. Effectively, it becomes simple enough for Father Harris to see how Sarah and Alice together form a kind of continuum: '[Sarah] would play Alice, become Alice, and he, Father Harris, had witnessed Alice's past in the evolving of Sarah's future' (206). In Part I of the novel, no connection seems to have been made between Alice and Sarah, but in Part II, their link creates a new portal not just into a reinvention of character, but an apparent system of order. This order, however, is not of the obvious kind where points are connected in succession of one another in the kind of linear fashion that Father Harris dismisses. Instead it is of a chaotic nature, undetermined only because its cause of determination is too complex to be identified. In reference to Chaos Theory, Ian Stewart writes in his book *Does God Play Dice?* that chaos can be defined as 'stochastic behaviour occurring in a deterministic system, [in other words], lawless behaviour governed entirely by law' (17). This law, however, is impossible to detect because it refuses predictability, famously exemplified by the 'butterfly effect' concept, which explicates that the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in one place results in a storm elsewhere. Thus, while Alice and Sarah may have been so disjointed in Part I where any kind of linkage between them would have seemed absurd, Part II offers them an opportunity for some kind of commonality. Why Alice and Sarah, and not Beth and Alice, or Sarah and Beth, does not really need an explanation, or perhaps, put quite simply, it cannot be explained, just as the randomness of movement of the whorls of cigarette smoke cannot be explained after a certain point.

While Father Harris embraces ideas of reinvention, connectivity, the philosophical and the poetic, his adversarial twin, Father Wilson represents the other end of the scale with his science of taxidermy and his insistence that ' " mist off a goat's horns was mist off a goat's horns was mist off a goat's horns was not the

Virgin’” (211). His approach to the anatomy of organisms differs from Father Harris’ in that he favours a rational and pragmatic study of the animals that he stuffs. And when Father Harris refers to the young Priest as a poet and a philosopher after his ‘discovery’ that both the moth and the German cockroach had chitinous teeth, Father Wilson exclaims, ‘ “ There’s no philosophy to the being of an ant, no poetry in the way it crawls over rotting food. Modern science describes its mechanics, anything else is medieval mysticism’” (215), thus making explicit the division in their ways of thinking. Although they are split, Father Harris’ philosophy that ‘all are bound together in *one* process of living, immeasurably various as it is’ (216) would suggest that both Father Wilson and Father Harris are interminably bound together, and the space within which their distinctions are dissolved is ultimately the same space of redemption where Christian dichotomies such as the ones mentioned in the Old Testament which the novel alludes to- Saved/Damned, Jews/Gentiles, We/Them, Birds/Insects, Men/Fish- are finally annihilated. In other words, it is also the poetic space of ‘Our Lady’ which Lance and the other characters are attempting to find and inhabit. And this space ensures not difference, but resemblance, and accommodates the mythical, the fantastical, the odd as well as the ordinary. For as Foucault states, in order to maintain the continuum of seemingly different objects, one has to allow into this order, the symbol of difference, which he characterises as the ‘monster’, as well as the symbol of resemblance, which is the ‘fossil’. The monster represents the missing pieces or the background of the taxonomical scheme of which the fossil is explicitly a part. Thus, Foucault writes, ‘against the background of the continuum, the monster provides an account...of the genesis of differences, and the fossil recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblances, the first buddings of identity’ (157). What is important in Foucault’s statement is the contribution of both elements, antitheses of

one another, like Father Wilson and Father Harris, to the epistemological foundations of perceiving the natural world. In relation to the novel, this monster/fossil symbology can be suitably applied to the way in which the odd/mysterious/ shameful (monster) corresponds with the normal/conventionally historical (fossil). In fact, *Our Lady* is littered with such correspondences: Beth's racial heritage where her Indian coolie blood signifies the 'monster' within the 'fossil' of her English middle-class upbringing, Father Harris' lack of 'logic' as the 'monster' in the 'fossil' of Father Wilson's established Cartesian rationality and Arawakian magic as the 'monster' within the 'fossil' of Christian tradition. This is the novel's attempt at acknowledging the monster, of intermingling it with the fossil so as to reject each one's isolation, again another coolitude point. For Torabully, bringing out silenced elements in society, whether in terms of race, class or culture, is very much at the pivot of coolitude's poetics and politics. Thus, at this present moment, the demonization and neglect of coolies within their respective societies, has made it necessary for the coolitudinisation of their condition. In other words, it is imperative to bring them to the forefront of society, first to be acknowledged, and then to be equalized with the other elements within the society's plural context. For Dabydeen, the true healing of not just the coolie's condition but that of the other races in Guyana and the way in which their interaction occurs can only be performed through an understanding of how pre-Columbian life correlates with the post-Columbian one, hence the structure of the novel.

v) The Redemptive Language

Apart from the structure, another restitutive technique that *Our Lady* employs is that of language, an aspect in the regenerative process that is unavoidable, perpetually propounded as it is by postcolonial theorists, and in relation to the Caribbean context, language is one of the most available forms of resistance. Glissant states that the lack of language in the region is linked to two factors: firstly, the community's history of slavery and indenture which led to a silencing of their past, and secondly, the socio-economic situation. The repression of the past, he writes, erodes language and the alienation from the physical reality of the environment results in an inadequate language to express the community's communication with the land. Effectively, things are externalised in words, and new modes of articulation appear, or rather the creolization of language begins. Glissant writes that 'creolization offers a different framework, within which the lack of language and the subject's relation to language cease to be relevant because language has become so fluid and diverse that it can no longer be seen as having any role in the constitution of subjectivity' (in Britton, 51). Thus language upholds its own consciousness and becomes a thing with unlimited potential to generate variations of thoughts, sentiments and notions, and as Harris puts it, the language of fiction is especially suited for these kinds of alternations because it is a 'living language'. This living language 'composes, within the artist, an interior unpredictable dialogue that gives rise to variables within the language of the Imagination and a ventriloquism of Spirit' (199). It is equipped with a transcendental quality that crosses bridges and creates new ones. Coolitude propounds the centrality of language to the excavation of history and the reformation of the coolie's place in society. Torabully writes of how language has caged him and his

people within the structures of colonial labour: 'For all time/ Language has cooled me./ Pure water/ Pappadumbed, curried away, coiled' (221). Thus, he states that 'language...[is] a potent source of relations to the world, to a new universe, or reconnecting to one's humanity in fact, [and] is among the most important spheres of resistance to plantocratic or colonial societies, specially from people who "left" their aesthetic universe, their symbolical status in language, as they were treated as objects or subhuman entities' (173).

In view of the history of language, where its significance has changed from being a mode simply in which to mark the world, to its representative role for the Classics and its signifying one for the modern world, the reassessment of language is crucial. For as Foucault writes in reference to what language has become, 'the profound kinship of language with the world...was dissolved...[the] uniform layer, in which the *seen* and the *read*, the visible and the expressible, were endlessly woven, vanished too. Things and words were to be separated from one another' (*The Order of Things*, 43). Thus, the association between the 'thing' and the 'word' needs to be reformulated, re-birthing, in order to create a fresh perception of the world where language cannot simply be relegated to a construction whose only role is to signify. *Our Lady* constantly attempts to build bridges between word and flesh, subject and object, and it does so not only to surpass those binaries, but also to indicate the special rhythm that materialises from the construction of such bridges. For instance, Manu's relationship with the natural life of the jungle is defined in one sense by the musical linguistics of imitation: ' "Pi-pi-you. Pi-pi-you" he called out imitating the whistle of a bird...Listen you hear that? Crat-crat-cratak-crat-cratak. Is a crow, what we call blanie-bird"' (89). The sounds of the jungle have been translated into a rhythmic language that can only baffle Lance who is alienated from the jungle's environment.

This rhythmic language is, before anything else, performative and indicates ‘the march of Nature’ (Benitez-Rojo, 17) and its very rhythm creates the effect of the words, which are of course, invented ones in line with the noises of the jungle. Thus, although the words may not have discursive meaning, they have an intuitive one that relates directly to the physical world.

In fact, the entire novel is a comment on language as a means of redemption. Part II exists as a doubly written text, firstly by Dabydeen, and secondly by Lance, where articulation provides a gateway into finding out ‘what is’ or ‘what might be’. The Priest’s story which was ‘broken and haphazard’ and littered with ‘cryptic lines, gnomic paragraphs, obscure notes, doodles, impossible puns’ (94), had to be decoded as it were, and reinvented in a new language in order for Lance to ‘depart in peace’ (278). Thus, the rewritten manuscript symbolizes, even as it exists as a thing in its own right, the amalgamation of the imagination and language to produce possibilities that materialise in the ceaseless rehearsals of characters. This alludes to the fact that characters can always be rewritten, recreated, reformed. In other words, alternatives are always available, as the novel seems to be suggesting all along. For from the very start of *Our Lady*, certain words are given substitutes in brackets. The substitutes are ironic indications of not double meanings but secret sentiments that expose the malleability of the spoken word: ‘Astonished’ is followed by ‘(admonished)’ (3), ‘antiquity’ by ‘(iniquity)’ (3), ‘admiration’ by ‘(abomination)’ (5) and ‘client’ by ‘(cunt)’ (61).

Even Lance’s journey to Pillar is foreshadowed by a linguistic tone. His first introduction to Pillar is through the innumerable scrawlings of the word ‘Pillar’ in the Priest’s manuscript, ‘with variations like “rape”, “liar”, “pillage”, “lap”, “lip”’ (108), thus preparing him for the violent history of the place, which he receives from Manu.

The anagrams, which bear some light on the reality of Pillar, suggest the transference of language to the physical life.

It is possible to deduce, following the discussions above, that *Our Lady* works as a performative text, never content to remain still. In fact, one can even imagine a rewriting of the novel, a ceaseless project of exploration and renewal, with characters and events never tiring of the process of 'becoming'.

Chapter 3: K.S. Maniam's *The Return* and *In A Far Country*

In an attempt to identify the significance of the Indian presence in Malaysia, *The Return* focuses on several concepts such as the transference of space into place, the maintenance of place as a cultural marker and the problems that accompany such processes. The most prominent issue is the isolation and consequent ghettoization of the coolie community which leaves the text and its author in a negative stage of coolitude where essentialism and a defiance against the social mosaic limit the novel's exploration of the wider frames of coolitude. Furthermore, the protagonist, Ravi's denial of his Indian heritage poses a dilemma that contributes to his self-alienation. This refusal of cultural reality is reflected in his appropriation of fairy tales and adventure stories as a means of separating the fragments in his life, while also providing him with a tool to counter the oppression of his colonial education. The novel realizes its positive coolitude qualities through language, its rhythm and unique localization which highlight the intermingling of various social elements. Finally, *The Return* acknowledges the cyclical dimensions of history, propagated in coolitude's discourse as central in the re-charting of the coolie's past. *In A Far Country* demonstrates, both in form and content, coolitude's baroque element by dissolving subject-object duality through an experimentation with light, time and space. In extension, the text uses Indian spiritual philosophy to understand and henceforth reassess spaces. But before it ventures to do this, the novel delves into the past and a process of re-membling which involves both India and the sea. Subsequently, the protagonist enters various fluid and borderless states wherein interracial and intergender relationships are explored through a non-prejudiced lens, hence allowing for the formation of a social mosaic.

a) *The Return*

'Migration is a one way trip. There is no "home" to go back to'— (Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves", 115).

i) The text's motivations

The literal re-membling of *kala pani* migration and the continual rehearsals of characters within a web of social interplay typify the ways in which Dabydeen extends his coolitude sensibility. The previous chapter demonstrated that latent within the subjugation of Guyanese coolies, both during and after the indenture period, were

psychical reactions to teleological history and temporal-spatial reformations of identity and 'origins'. The issue of 'origins' is central to Maniam's *The Return* in its attempt to articulate *spaces* that have become *places* in the physical and imaginary lives of Indo-Malaysians. What prevails in the novel is a quest to identify a point of origination with the conviction that 'origins' is a complicated and complex starting point simply because it is multifocal, and therefore already negates the very concept of 'origins', which has always been assumed to be monodirectional. Thus, in its assessment of 'origins', it leaves that notion and focuses on 'beginnings' instead. These 'beginnings' (for there is no meta-beginning; the novel stresses several that correlate and overlap at various times) are manifested through the idea of 'the return'. Edward Said differentiates between 'origins' and 'beginnings', indicating that the former is divine or metaphysical while the latter carries implications of history, repetition and return. It therefore insists on the Harrisian notion of a continual return to the past (which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, is how Dabydeen reforms Caribbean historiography) in order to extract, as it were, numerous points of departure from the mass of historical accounts. Essentially, this 'return' is a temporal rebellion against the colonial antiquation of history, which is, as Bill Ashcroft writes, 'temporality itself' and therefore requires temporal resistance (82).

Chapter 1 of the present thesis explored the inseparability of time, the death of the present moment through retrospection and the multiplicity of 'beginnings' that arrive after an unwritten past, awaiting articulation. Thus, 'the return' to history becomes crucial in understanding how 'beginnings' come into being. Like the 'scraps' of history in Dabydeen's *The Counting House*, Maniam's novels are littered with such indications not only in the Indo-Malaysian community, but within Malaysian society at large. The obliteration of certain historical aspects for the maintenance of

hegemony has produced apertures between the past and the present, thus creating a deep sense of cultural alienation in most of his characters. What is most prevalent is an initial denial of history before 'the return' occurs. It is the journey to this point of return that is of importance to Maniam, rather than the actual space of return. While Dabydeen focuses on this space, where events, as mentioned earlier, are *literally* remembered through historical settings, Maniam is more interested in *why* the right kind of memory is necessary and *why* it has failed to reach the diasporic Indians in Malaysia. Thus, although both Dabydeen and Maniam acknowledge that history is splintered, they express this differently, primarily because their specific social circumstances, which include cultural and political divergences, have shaped the kind of historical reconfigurations deemed necessary in the initial stages of coolie recuperation.

Firstly, the Indians in Malaysia are a minority, constituting 8 % of the total population. The Indians in Guyana make up almost 50 % of the populace. Therefore, their racial unit is inevitably stronger and their voice as a community louder. Chapter 1 has already indicated that because historical work on Indo-Caribbeans has been and is still being done, their place in history is becoming more entrenched. That is, their story is being told. In Malaysia, not only is the arrival of the indentured coolies neglected in history textbooks, but scholarly work in this area is scarce. Thus, what is evident is a blanking out of a crucial aspect of the country's history in the psyche of the common citizen. Malaysian scholar Farish Noor has written about the presence of an arbitrary historical focus in the country. He cites the example of the Hindu-Buddhist influence in the Malay Archipelago dating back to the 1st century A.D, which has been ignored at the expense of an Islamic view of the region. He writes that 'Malaysia's Malay-Muslim population seems to be engaged in a deliberate erasure of

their pre-Islamic past' (23)²¹. This scoring out reflects the general attitude in Malaysia where *histories* are deemed insignificant in view of the establishment of *History*.

What is favoured is a Malay-centric past, present and future where Malay dominance or *Ketuanan Melayu* moulds the racial and political destiny of Malaysia. Ethnicity and politics are united and partially achieved through the narrativisation of nation where 'the story that decides "what happened" is the story that determines "what is"' (Ashcroft, 92). This becomes problematic and perilous in plural societies such as Malaysia because, as Cheah Boon Keng states, 'the rewriting of Malaysian history to give more attention to indigenous Malay elements has in turn created a shift towards ethnic politics in which each community tries zealously to advance and protect its place within the nation's history' (62). In turn, 'national' history and 'national' culture represent *indigenous* history and culture, rather than the multiple contributive elements within national existence. Indeed, the government of 1971, in response to the bloody racial riots of 1969, stated that ' "national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region"' (in Saravanamuttu, 103), provoking an immediate attack, by the other communities, on forced assimilation.

The notion of *Ketuanan Melayu* was established early in the nation's history. Johan Saravanamuttu writes that the 1957 Constitution 'recognised from the outset the special position and status of the Malay community and entrenched various privileges related to symbols of polity, language, religion, land and "special rights"'

²¹ V.S. Naipaul makes a similar observation in his book *Among the Believers*. He writes that the passion of the Muslims in Malaysia is a special one- 'the passion of people who, in spite of Pakistan, feel themselves a threatened minority; the passion of people who – with their view of history as a "pleasant tale of conquest"- feel they have ceased to be conquerors; the passion, above all, of Muslims who feel themselves on the margin of a true Muslim world' (262). Consequently, the desire to forget Malaysia's pre-Islamic past is strong amidst a climate of racial and religious assertion.

(93). Thus, he concludes that ‘multiculturalism understood today as stressing equal status and worth of citizens was not implemented’ (93). Maniam himself has written about the condition of plurality in Malaysia where ‘no commonly accessible reality for Malays, Chinese and Indians’ has come about because ‘distracted versions of the realities of history’ (“Writing from the Fringe”, 281) has caused the establishment of numerous cultural solitudes, existing within splintered and disjointed histories.

In *The Return*, he comments on the effects of these solitudes on individuals struggling to penetrate the chill of such segmentations. The extent of desolation caused by that effort is enough to instigate the notion of ‘the return’, where the present is so crucially abstracted from the physical environment, that returning to the past is a problematic notion. However, the very concept of ‘the return’ is invaluable for Indo-Malaysian self-assessment because it marks the first step towards re-ordering the many historical moments that have contributed to their diaspora. Therefore, it is only right that the notion of ‘the return’ indicates a beginning and not an origin which connotes a fixed *source* of inception. The source is ambivalent as we shall later discover through the way *Nataraja*, the Hindu god of origination, becomes a trope for acculturation. This inception is the point of coolitude’s Voyage, the journey ‘out’ as well as the journey ‘in’ to which everything must return. It signifies a cycle existing in a sphere whose centre is not stationary. It is the circle of coolitude and it holds multifarious spaces within its shape. What the circle indicates is a temporal subversion of linear time as well as a creation of an Indian framework through which perceptions are formed. Torabully writes of his *Cale d’Etoiles*: ‘Its cyclical aspect echoes the cyclical vision Oriental peoples have of time and history’ (157). This perpetual return, which is the essence of coolitude’s founding text, is the very repetition evident in *The Return*. Furthermore, the circle of the cycle resembles the

archetypal sphere allegorized by Dabydeen in *Our Lady of Demerara* as the space of overlapping, interpenetration, perpetual mingling and cross-culturality. It is perhaps accurate enough to claim the relevance of the circle as a diasporic symbol in the works studied so far. The various beginnings called upon in the novel's quest for 'the return' are both literal and lateral. The most obvious is the novel's very beginning which is also the beginning of Indo-Malaysian life, represented by the protagonist's grandmother, Periathai. Therefore, it is necessary that the opening sections of the novel are devoted to her arrival, survival and death in Malaya. The meaning of 'the return' is woven around the three primary characters, Periathai, Naina and Ravi, representing the three generations of Indo-Malaysians, where 'the return' expresses itself within a narrative of diaspora, at its various levels. But before we explore why this 'return' is necessary, the causes of this necessity have to be understood through notions such as the separation between ideology and environment, the textualisation of power and the power of textualisation and the failure of cultural transference which then leads to the fragmentation in history, culture and politics that is ubiquitous within the Indo-Malaysian context.

ii) Place, Space and Faith

Michel de Certeau draws a distinction between 'place' and 'space', suggesting that the former is a 'fixed and stable order which delimits relations of co-existence' while the latter is 'composed of intersections of mobile elements' (157). Thus, he favours space over place because space contains, in its looseness, the unity of

conflictual dimensions and the transactional quality of cross-cultural engagement. Indeed, he insists that 'the reassertion of the significance of the spatial dimension in cross-cultural transactions encourages participation in a critical enterprise which questions monolithic historiography' (158). Space then offers the kind of spatio-temporal alternative to history, one that accepts Hayden White's concept of 'rhetoric' which advocates an 'awareness of the variety of ways of configuring a past which itself exists only as a chaos of forms' (Ashcroft, 84). It is not, however, merely a chaos of pasts that meets its potential within space, for equally as successful is a chaos of living moments, akin to the living reality of place explored in *Our Lady of Demerara* through Harris' notion of the 'living landscape'. In other words, the 'living space' is a cornucopia of spatial and temporal elements existing simultaneously in a mosaic.

It must be stated, however, that place remains a pertinent issue in the diasporic imaginary because it signifies location and visibility, elements that are crucial for a community's recognition within a societal whole. Ashcroft writes that the diasporic person's passion for the ocular exists as a necessary reaction against their very real marginalization in aspects of politics and culture. The prominence of the visual, propounded by colonialists in their attempt to naturalize ideology, creates the powerful 'equation of knowledge and sight' which finally produces 'a profound impact on the conception, representation and experiencing of place in the colonized world' (127).

Similar to the large ornamental National Archive building that Lance encounters in Guyana, Periathai's 'real house' (4) signifies her physical existence in the country to which she has recently migrated. Transference of meaning from the visual to the homely (or *Heimlich* in the Freudian sense) is neatly assumed and is seen

as a route to achieving a sense of belonging in the new country. Thus, the ‘colourful entrance’ to her house was ‘a double-pillared affair, it had strange stories carved on its timber faces...some of the Ramayana episodes stood out with palpable poignancy...one pillar carried the creation of the Ganges, the cascading water stilled, another the typical, rustic look of the Indian village’ (4). Here, spiritual faith is combined with a tangible presence in order to assert a ‘living place’, one that desperately needs to present a strong cultural identity. Invocation of the ‘Indian’ element, one brought through migrational instinct, stands for a religious necessity in a land that highlights the conflict between faith and place. Thus, Periathai’s ‘re-immersion, a recreating of the thick spiritual and domestic air she must have breathed there, back in some remote district in India’ (6) is the spiritual baggage brought to Malaya, which although against her will, stands in opposition to the land and all its concrete inferences. Her non-ownership of the land on which her house is built, where her appeal for ownership is based ‘on the grounds that she had occupied that bit of land long enough to be its rightful heir’ (8), is a real reminder that her logic of belonging is antithetical to the legal and pragmatic rationalization imposed on her by her new country. In effect, she claims possession of the land by stating that ‘“My many spirits roam it...when I die I’ll never stop haunting the place”’ (8). By fusing the dead and the living, or rather by corrupting the binary that distances them, she is commenting on the meaning of ‘place’, indicating that it is not so much its physicality that defines it as a marker, although that is important to make one’s presence felt, but other spatial qualities that make ‘place’ significant. It is at this point that de Certeau’s distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’ becomes evident. Where spirit and matter, the dead and the living, the past and the present, commingle, space becomes the dynamic element that assists in the “transportation” of subjects through prescribed places

and/or across legislated boundaries' (157). Thus, when the protagonist's father, Naina develops a new approach to understanding the land, he questions the distinction between the living and the dead: "'What's the difference between the living and the dead?'" (161). This indicates the creation of a space that subverts the notion of boundaries and produces what Michael Taussig, in his book *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, has called the 'colonial death-space' where the healing of the split between the spirit and the senses occurs. It also generates a resistance to colonizing impositions and strict demarcations of place, favouring instead an anti-authorial dialogue between healer and patient, the dead and the living, which 'connects quite distinct forces of flux and steadiness' (463). Space, then, becomes more than a mere extension of place. Instead, it is a mobility that annihilates the fixtures that place assumes.

However, as mentioned earlier, space cannot be replaced by place in the diasporic sensibility. For as the editors of *Space and Place* state, 'if places are no longer the clear supports of identity, they nonetheless play a potentially important part in the symbolic and psychical dimension of our identification' (xii). Indicators of this identification are rife with cultural resonances in an attempt to emphasise the ocular presence of a community. Thus, Hindu festivals in *The Return* are celebrated by highlighting visual symbols such as 'the lights, mango leaves strung out over the doorways, the pilgrimages to Sri Subramanya temple...[and] the painting of the bull horns' (13). While the novel acknowledges these cultural signifiers as important for the formation of communal identity, it stresses that these very signifiers work to further alienate place and faith to the detriment of space. For 'these festivals', the narrator informs us, 'created a special country for us...we were inhabitants of an invisible landscape tenuously brought into prominence' by the aforementioned

cultural symbols (13). Unlike Dabydeen's novel where the polarization of faith and place works through a mobilization of spiritual beliefs and physical life to create a 'colonial death-space', place in *The Return* generates more alienation and strangeness than the positive appropriation of the jungle's chaos perpetuated in *Our Lady of Demerara*. This is probably due to the differences in historical and social composition in Dabydeen's Guyana and Maniam's Malaysia where the indigenous population in the latter, who are a majority, have set notions of what the land means (as we will later discover in *In A Far Country*) and make clear distinctions between the 'sons of the soil' and immigrants. The majority of the populace in Guyana, however, are 'Peoples of the Sea', as Benitez-Rojo put it, who are 'immigrant' in nature. Therefore, their connections with the land are not subsumed by an overwhelming indigenous community and they are instinctively drawn towards a creative understanding of their surroundings.

Relationship with the land, then, becomes an obsession for Maniam's characters, one that attempts to coordinate the physicality of place with spiritual faith in order to generate the very 'colonial death-space' that Dabydeen exposes in the Guyana of his novel. For although various theorists and writers of diaspora have propounded the imaginative element of diasporic existence, Maniam warns that the *right* kind of imagination has to assist in the life and survival of a migrant community. The ghettoized Indian plantation society in *The Return* live a mental life, one steeped in several cultural bubbles disconnected from the land, thus compelling the narrator to state: 'How does one describe the land one lived in but never saw? It was more tangible than the concrete one we flitted through every day...we were hemmed into our rooms, houses, and into our minds' (14). Although this imaginative space is beautiful where 'there were a lot of colours in our invisible world' (14), it is not

sufficient for the generation and continuation of cultural meaning. Hence, once exposed to another culture, it is relatively easy for Ravi the protagonist to turn away ‘from the God who ruled my people’ (79).

As will become more evident, *The Return* represents a coolitude text on the edge of negating the Voyage in favour of staying trapped within the initial stages of diaspora—stages that maintain an attachment to a non-relatable or rather non-adaptable cultural lexicon. Indeed, the ambivalence in Maniam’s attitude to plantation life, which borders on disgust and empathy, resembles a Naipaulian approach to the trauma of exile. Torabully suggests that Naipaul’s work may be regarded as ‘a transitory phase of coolitude’ because although he explores ‘avenues of liberation’ (210), he is essentially doubtful of the redemption of the coolie and reveals this through the numerous contradictions in his portrayal of Indian characters. Such conflicts are nevertheless necessary, states Torabully, because they ‘offer food for thought as to the potentialities of coolitude, and the consequences of their denial’ (210). This transitional coolitude phase is ‘caught between colonial representations and the necessities of modernity, pointing to possibilities of facing the complexity of the situation, and understanding the attitudes which prevent the emergence of a liberating attitude to the mosaic *imaginaire* of cultures and civilizations’ (Carter and Torabully, 206-207). Similarly, *The Return* is unique in the way it presents itself as a negative *and* positive coolitude text by exposing the processes through which migrants leave their essentialisms and arrive at a point of chaotic coexistence simply by recognizing the immediacy of place *in relation* to belief systems for the creation of a space of constant meetings and movements. This theme of Relation will be further expounded later on in this chapter under the heading of ‘The Return’, once aspects of the novel as a negative coolitude text have been fully explained before its emergence

as a positive coolitude text.

Carter and Torabully cite Emmanuel Nelson's observation that the literature of the Indian diaspora is typified by '“cultural anxiety [in which] desperate attempts at cultural self-perpetuation [appear frequently]”' (140). *The Return* demonstrates this anxiety through the isolation of Ravi's Indian community, its perpetuation of the very 'cultural solitudes' that Maniam sees as problematic in Malaysian society. It resembles Naipaul's portrayal of the Tulsis in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, which Carter and Torabully mention as being symptomatic of social segregation in the dynamics of the coolie diaspora.

Thus, the absence of a mosaic poetics in the first half of *The Return* is a comment on the geographical seclusion of the coolies who were 'perpetually Condemned' to life on the estates and the consequence of this on the level of adaptation available for the community. Therefore, because of its material, the novel is unable to present, from the start, the poetics of Relation that coolitude propounds. However, its absences stand for the spaces that may be appropriated and filled as it were with gestures of Relation. As we will later discover, the ending of the novel redeems its positive coolitudeness after a period of doubt, contradiction and fragmentation, by demonstrating that cross-cultural amalgamations do, in fact, occur even within seemingly detached communities.

iii) Processes of self-identification

The implications of the separation between a system of belief and the immediate environment can be found in the realm of education where the text or the written word works as a mode of identification, which, when not critically judged,

further warps the relationship between physical and mental existence. From the onset, Ravi is governed by the textual, verbal and visual information afforded by his education. His Tamil lessons with Murugesu created ‘a mysterious, rich world’ (18), one laden with imaginative qualities that stood against the squalor of the estate. However, Ravi manages to identify with characters and events from the textbooks ‘specially ordered from India’ because they became points of cultural references that he ‘felt for and understood’ (20). In other words, these lessons provided an avenue for discovering aspects of his ‘home’ culture and allowed some degree of engagement between a textual India and the ‘little’ India of the plantation. Although the Tamil books generated thoughts of an imaginary India, which Rushdie has affirmed is a natural consequence of exile where he writes ‘our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost’ (*Imaginary Homelands*, 10), it is none other than the Tamil language that provides Ravi with the closest confirmation of familiarity: ‘The lines of curving, intricate Tamil writing unfolded an excitingly unexpected and *knowable* world’ (21, my emphasis). Thus, when he is sent to an English school, he laments that ‘the world I had known fell apart’ (20).

The transition from this ‘knowable’ world, which is really a world of symbolic fragments, to the world of English culture marks the most obvious clash between ideology and environment that Ravi is subjected to. The English textbooks immediately call upon a world disjointed from physical reality: ‘They transported us into a pleasant, unreachable land’ (24). The creation of an illusory place, at first, served merely to distance Ravi from the very ‘knowable’ world of which he was confident. Posters of ‘countryside sharply contrasted to the Malaysian landscape’ (38) which he hung on the walls of his room were indicators of an appropriated

imaginative space, rebelliously antithetical to the ocular, concrete world. However, as we will later discover, these conflicts opened doors for self-assessment, which were often manifested through texts and notions of fantasy. The condition of this fantasy is the separation of a tangible reality from an imaginative one, a condition, as we have seen so far, that Ravi is perpetually faced with. But before that is explored, it is crucial to understand the many facets of cultural alienation that Ravi experiences and the ways in which he struggles for self-identification.

Levinas writes that ‘this feeling of identity between self and body, will never allow those who wish to begin with it to rediscover, in the depths of this unity, the duality of a free spirit that struggles against the body to which it is chained’ (in Boyarin and Boyarin, 96). The body, thus, limits the spiritual capacity of the self because it denotes markers such as skin and colour as primary in the conceptualization of identity. Etienne Balibar refers to these indicators as ‘stigmata of otherness’ (in Boyarin and Boyarin, 100) that deem the body necessary for acts of segregation. Thus, in *The Return*, Miss Nancy the English teacher, internalizes her putative cultural superiority by stressing the physical ‘wrongness’ of her Indian students whose hair that is greased with coconut oil, described as ‘ “black wires [smeared with] rotten butter”’, is in need of reformation (27). When she does restyle their hair, in a way which she recognizes as ‘proper’, she declares ‘ “There! That’s how hair ought to look”’ (53). Her sense of corporeal hygiene is shaped by a strong conviction in a hierarchical order of cleanliness. The externalization of negative and therefore stereotypical Indian sanitary habits through her dramatized demonstration serves to distinguish the comic from the serious, and therefore the wrong from the right, approach to keeping the body clean: ‘The collection of rusty pail, milk tin dipper and even a cracked, enamel spittoon (the final insult?), one afternoon in front

of the class, unnerved us, the Indians. Miss Nancy wore, to keep up the farce, a faded, dotted blouse and a cheap floral sarong over her dress. The class roared with laughter' (29). Following this, she displays a range of Western tools of hygiene, clearly affirming their foremost position in the hierarchy of cleanliness and compelling Ravi to state: 'I hadn't realised that so many accessories were needed to keep the body clean' (30). From hereon, the body becomes a significant tool for Miss Nancy's imposition of cultural value. In other words, she uses the space of the body to spread, whether blatantly or metaphorically, notions of how the body relates to a sense of identity, and how it can be deconstructed for the benefits of cultural imperialism.

Crane and Mohanram state that 'questions of identity oscillate between the essentialized notion of the body and constructivist discourses on nation, class and gender' (xi). Identity, thus, is formed through a conjoining of physical appearance and ideology, where the body acts as a slate for the inscription of the cultural complex that has shaped the consciousness behind that body, as well as a marker of identity in the most immediate sense. The importance of how the body is presented in relation to the cultural codes that accompany it is evident, as reiterated by Miss Nancy, in the way the body is groomed. Therefore, by cleaning and preparing the bodies of her students, she is not only instructing the way they should present their bodies, but also the kind of culture that should be reflected from the state of their bodies. When she declares that ' "the savages need cleaning everywhere"' (53), she is articulating from a position that aims to deconstruct the 'other' body, to shape and purify it, as part of a process of acculturation. Thus, as 'Miss Nancy took the various parts, cleaned them, and put them back on the different bodies, coldly and meticulously' (53), she was performing an act of dismemberment as part of the re-ordering of those bodily elements within an acceptable cultural network. Furthermore, the fairytales and stories

which she relates to the students are laden with cannibalistic sentiments: ‘ “Chomp! Chomp! Chomp! I’m going to eat your fingers, then your toes!...I’ll eat your hearts, roasted alive!...He went in and gobbled her up in one, long, delicious moment: toes, calves, thighs, belly, breasts and face” ’ (47-59). These act as indicators of her consumption of their bodies as part of a destruction of their identities, both corporeal and cultural.

Consequently, under the tutelage of Miss Nancy, Ravi begins to esteem structure and organization, values that are decidedly opposed to that of his Indian milieu: ‘The craving for order soon possessed me’ (37). The collapse of his ‘Indian’ self which occurs rather rapidly is projected through spatial demarcations and the activation of a Western-centric logic. Thus, he begins to favour the private over the public, the ego over the spirit, linear progress over the seemingly irrational. He sections off a space for himself in the front room of his house: ‘I marked off a cubicle with chalk. No one could step into that imaginary room. I kept all my school things and I often read or wrote there’ (38). This territorial act suggests a reformation of his ideas on space. Place has been transformed into space in the sense that it is now imbued with intention, habitation and a plethora of notions concerning the homeliness of his existence. In short, this new space describes the route of his cultural orientation. Ultimately, it is a place that is experienced not from ‘real’ stuff, but from a discursive and visual world, formed and residing within the imagination. Thus, the posters which he hangs on his walls are crucial for the maintenance of this world because they are the material manifestations of a non-material dimension. Symbols of habitation within these posters are disconnected from his immediate symbols of habitation which, through Miss Nancy’s ideology of hygiene, have been labeled inadequate. Hence, the poster ‘of the interior of an English house’ with its ‘Gothic fireplace, the mantelpiece

covered with gargoyle-like, tiny sculptures, the sides crammed with metallic creepers and animal heads [and]...a coal cauldron, polished to a shine...near the railing' (40), signifies his fresh conceptualization of place, which ironically, magnifies his actual displacement. For as soon as he steps out of this self-styled space, he is faced with the filth and poverty of his living conditions. It is no wonder then that the five afternoons a week with Miss Nancy and her stories allowed him to slip into an 'invisible country' which served as 'a complete contrast to the world we lived in' (50). However, this extreme of situations eventuates in a confusion of his identity and a splintering of his existence. He states that 'my early experiences of life...were frustratingly fragmented. There was no direction or pattern' (64). What is left for him to hold on to, in other words, the only remaining essences of substance available to him, are the very fragments that seem to make up his entirety. Similar to the singling out of body parts that marks Miss Nancy's dismemberment of the Indian body, Ravi selects the disjointed sections of his cultural and educational experience for the creation of meaning in his world and for the partial preservation of his self-worth.

Ironically, it is through the very cannibalistic fairytales of Miss Nancy's imagination that Ravi manages to subvert the total conditioning of his person. There is, of course, as Bhabha stresses, no such thing as 'total conditioning' for imperialism and colonialism are transactional events and identification is not an entrenchment because 'identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an "image" of totality' (118). These images, then, are representations and not presentations of completeness. Therefore, they become metonyms of identification, fragments that are magnified for purposes that come close to a spatial reassessment of meaning. It is crucial, at this point, to consider the fairytales, stories and characters that have produced images of identification for Ravi,

at various levels and at different times.

The surfacing of images occurs at a fractal point of disunity. Pierre Macherey writes that 'if the mirror constructs, it is an inversion of the movement of genesis: rather than spreading, it breaks. Images emerge from this laceration. Elucidated by these images, the world and its powers appear and disappear, disfigured at the very moment when they begin to take shape...in displacing objects it retains their reflection' (53-4). Thus, it is in disfigurement and dislodgement that images, through reflection, maintain some aspect of themselves. In describing reality, or what supposedly *is*, which is Ravi's central problematic in the coordination of his home-life and school-life, East and West, imagination and materiality, the notion of reflection has to be included in the representation of what constitutes the 'real'. For it is through mimesis that one's reflection is made evident in the 'real' world and which then comments on the very nature of reflection. To see oneself in an external object, whether reflected in a mirror (which is essentially what mimesis is) or through the *act* of mimesis, produces the 'inversion of the movement of genesis', a pathway to the construction and destruction of images and a subversion of the totality of reality. It is here, in the moment of inversion, that the space of displacement, once deemed disparaging, becomes positive and receptive of mobility, *additions*, unique enunciation and most importantly, of signs. In formulating coolitude, Torabully stresses the importance of 'the constellation of signs' (14) in the coolie imaginary which contributes to the *positive* fragmentation of coolie identity. Pieces of coolie identity are woven together in mosaic-fashion, through 'archipelagic thought' which Torabully claims is innate in the mentality of the diasporised coolie. These pieces are symptoms of optical and ideological experience formed in the moments occurring between the performance of mimesis and the arrival of reflection. They almost

resemble Harris's diminutives, but differ from them because they are concrete and less fleeting in nature. Furthermore, they do not represent potentialities, rather, they describe a situation with an earnest intention of capturing reality.

The character Ernie in Miss Nancy's stories, an English boy around Ravi's age, provides a strong example of an image produced at the point between the *performance* of mimesis and the *production* of reflection. Ravi's appropriation of Ernie to signify his ambition and an aspect of himself itself signifies his fragmentation that manifests as a result of a profound uncertainty: 'I was lost...at the fringe' (36). Thus, Ernie becomes his alter-ego, or rather his double that comes about through a lack of self and a desire for identification at some level. However, the kind of identification that Ravi captures in Ernie is expressive of itself, rather than the object that it mimics. Theodore Adorno postulates that the subject of mimicry is not reflective of the object of mimicry, rather it is self-identical to its mimetic moment. Therefore, subject and object are not separated, instead they are conjoined in the space when the act of mimesis merges with the production of reflection.

Thus, in seeing himself within Ernie's character, Ravi doubles the capacity of his self, producing along the way a fusion of 'Ernie' and 'Ravi', within the imaginative space of his mind. This is an attempt at seeking a familiar body, a home for the soul. However, the very course of doubling creates an uncanny effect, one that disputes the distinction between the *Heimlich* (homely) and the *Unheimlich* (unhomely). It seeks to discover the familiar within the strange, and vice versa. As a stranger, that is, someone who is unable to identify a definite home for himself, Ravi's 'place' is located within realms of the uncanny where, as Chambers writes, 'cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make [him]self at home in an

interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present' (6). Therefore, although Ernie's world is markedly disjointed from Ravi's, with its 'farmhouse...remote, the sky fluffy, not like ours that bleached itself to a transparent blue by midday' (26), it is available to him as a symbol of the strangely familiar. It can be read as a trope for his diasporic existence, with its Janus-like quality and problematic definitions of home.

Indeed, it is uncanny when one charts Ravi's development from a boy growing up in a small estate village to an adult who values an urban life, and compares this to Ernie's shift from a rural farming life to life in the city where he sported 'the suit of a young man looking about himself...went to factories...stood sharply etched against a montage of pipes, cranes...the intricate pulsing hub of the British industrial network' (49). Ravi's life, thus, mirrors Ernie's. It is significant that Miss Nancy begins calling him Ernie, and following this, Ravi goes through a baptism of sorts. During one of her hygiene routines, Ravi is thrown into the bathtub after which 'Miss Nancy fished me out again, to soap my body over...and chuck me back into the water...I had been immersed!' (63). Accompanying this immersion, is the cheering of his classmates, "'Ernie! Ernie! Ernie!'", signifying not only his re-naming but his acceptance into the 'snow country of her [Miss Nancy's] imagination' as well (63). The 'baptism' represents the doubling effect of mimesis, in that the supposed 'neat' reflection of an object results in a repetition with a difference which is also the subversive mimicry that Bhabha advocates. Rita Theyuanboo's claim, in her dissertation "Cultural Identity and Diaspora in Selected Works by K.S.Maniam", that Ravi acquires invisibility through Ernie's imaginary world is perhaps inaccurate in the light of the synthesis of the two characters. For by merging with Ernie, in a union of mimesis and doubling, he defines some kind of identity for himself, one that pushes for visibility.

It is through the world of fantasy, represented by Ernie, Miss Nancy's fairytales and the books that Ravi reads, that he begins to understand his fragmentation and finds the means of healing the rifts within his personality. He becomes absorbed in reading and it is significant that his reading material comprises mainly of fantasy, adventure and comic books: 'I read widely:...adventures of the Famous Five, Sherlock Holmes...it was a relief to read the adventures of English schoolboys...[and] *Beano*, *Dandy* and *Topper*...[which] formed part of a raucous escape from my surroundings...I felt...I could face anything' (80-87). Robert Fraser writes that 'preference for romances and adventure stories over socio-political novels represent[s] an assertion of cultural identity, and a rejection of foreign cultural norms' (23). In Ravi's case, however, they provide him with the necessary escape from a fixed cultural identity, in order to search the possibilities of other kinds of identification. Ultimately, they expand his mentality and reveal the collision of worlds, ie., fantasy and reality, Indian and English, self and other, which produces a timeless and non-geometrically spatial zone for assessing who he really is. The fact that Miss Nancy's renditions of the Red Riding Hood, Snow White and Hansel and Gretel fairytales affect him profoundly, suggests that the confusion of the ordinary and the extraordinary offer him an opportunity to redefine not merely his reality, but the very meaning of reality in general. This is a chance at subverting any kind of 'total conditioning', whether from his Indian background or his English education. Furthermore, the reconsideration of the fairytales from the point of retrospection (for the novel is narrated by the adult Ravi who is re-membering his childhood) comments on Ravi's dissection of Miss Nancy's oppressive authority. Anne Brewster writes that 'the traditional English fairytales with which Miss Nancy woos her class are re-read by the narrator as myths of power and desire that *expose* Miss Nancy's sexual and

colonial predatoriness' (my emphasis, 179).

Irene Bassier suggests that the fantastic ' "reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary, shifting constructs, and thereby scrutinizes the category of the "real". Contradictions surface and are held antinomically in the fantastic text, as reason is made to confront all that it traditionally refuses to encounter"' (in Ashcroft, 81). Fantasy, then, provides the means to destruct entrenchments such as 'reality' and allows for the continual reshaping of it. In this way, fantasy is the ideal source for attacking oppression and stressing alternative modes of identification. Thus, while Dabydeen uses a nursery rhyme to open up spaces for the re-evaluation of history, Maniam selects stories of fantasy (fairytales, oral stories, comic and adventure books) to expose the possibilities of a reconsideration of self, whether public or private.

iv) Language

One of the prime aspects in coolitude's poetics is the reformation of language. For during the period of indenture, language was a means of branding the coolie with the most pragmatic of phrases. Indeed, Torabully writes that 'language...in the servant-master relationship, was divested of its poetic elements, of its creativity...of its baroque subversive capacities' (172). The acquisition of the master's language was a means of achieving economic and social mobility because such knowledge meant that the coolies were not blind to the contractual and legal terms set by their dominators. Therefore, 'bilingualism became a key advantage to those Indians who settled overseas during the indenture period' (Carter and Torabully, 127). Their mother-tongues served as symbols of cultural identity, while English became a

medium for cursing the master in his own tongue, as it were.

Furthermore, the written word was a crucial aspect in the cultural life of coolies. As Carter and Torabully write, they ‘set off on their voyage with books: the Qur’an, the Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana. These sacred texts were part and parcel of their journey...a struggle against deculturation took place. Coolies clung to their founding texts’ (115). It was the *Mahabharata*, in general, and the *Ramayana*, in particular, that became prominent features in the cultural imagination of the coolies. Satendra Nandan explains this by stating that both texts ‘have exile as their protean metaphors, as if dispossession or banishment were the necessary condition for our discovery both of ourselves and of this dust-laden world which we are all so infinitely tangled’ (“Migration”, 36). B. Parekh affirms the centrality of the *Ramayana* to the lives of indentured labourers as ‘its central theme of exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return...gave them the conceptual tools to make sense of their predicament’ (613). Additionally, because the *Ramayana* questioned several monologic establishments, it was the appropriate means of battling various oppressions. The absence of merely one version of the story meant that, as Paula Richman states, ‘the Ramayana tradition of South Asia [was] spacious enough to maintain room within its borders for tellings of Rama’s story that provide alternatives to authoritative tellings’ (20). The *Ramayana*, thus, features, at various degrees of intensity, in Maniam’s work as it does in Dabydeen’s and as we will later discover, in Nandan’s as well. The physical articulation of Rama’s story on the pillars of Periathai’s house, ‘Rama challenged, bow and arrow at the ready, yet his brows lined with anxiety for the missing Sita. The sculptured, fold-like flames envelope Ravana’s palace and threaten to engulf Sita’s tender, shapely limbs and breasts’ (4), represents the *Ramayana* as a trope not only for cultural identity but for the narration of the experience of diaspora,

from banishment to dispossession and exile.

The Return recognizes not merely the ways in which the written word reaches the imaginative dimensions of the diasporised Indian, but how the oral word presents itself in the articulation of coolie experience. It is a problematic issue especially since the coordination between utterance and material reality is incomplete. Ashcroft states that 'this tension, this gap, between the experienced place and the language available to describe it, lies at the heart of the experience of the post-colonial subject, the very essence of displacement' (153). Therefore, language in its standard form is unable to describe realities that occur in the spaces between observation and enunciation. This is evident in the break between the types of English spoken by Ravi and his peers: 'The language grated on my ear—it was the English we lapsed into after school hours' (42). Additionally, Tamil-infused English and 'pure' English are differentiated in the kind of communication that takes place within Ravi's community: 'The language we spoke in the long verandah of the houses was a defiant version of English, mingled with and sounding very Tamil. The minute we broke into "pure" English we were scolded' (80). The lack of synchronization between the 'language learnt' and the 'language spoken' is one aspect of this linguistic predicament. The other facet is the assumption, as Ee Tiang Hong suggests, that there exists a coherent connection between 'language and the real world, between signifier and signified, between sign and referent' (19). Thus, in due time, Ravi realizes that language is a superficial entity, one that does not come close to extending the wealth of thoughts, feelings, notions and, most importantly, of physical realities. He states that 'language was inadequate' and 'words were merely a medium...that...externalised a tiny fraction of what we felt' (71). In the mimetic dimension of language, elements of experience are lost in the process of translating the actual into the verbal. Amresh Sinha writes

that for Adorno, 'the linguistic aspect of language is manifested through mimetic expression which itself is repressed in the medium of language insofar as this repression of mimesis is expressed by the language, which has "disgraced" itself by falling into the "pitfalls" of exchange language that determines the separation of subject and object' (145). This very separation is the cause of alienation produced by the inadequacy of language to describe the world, and even more so, for dislocated communities whose language stands in conflict with the world in which they are displaced. Thus, it is fitting that Ravi 'depended more on the discordant...rhythm that lay behind words and moved people to action' (71). This resembles both Benitez-Rojo's formulation of a polyrhythm that communicates the nuances in Caribbean society and Dabydeen's creation of a 'living language' that connects the gaps between word and flesh. Although Ravi views his community's speech as coming 'from an imagination that had withered because that clutter I was later to identify as culture wasn't there', it is the rhythm of that speech, which was 'staccato, coarse, unending and seemingly unnecessary' that finally 'sounded rich' (71).

The useful expansion of this rhythm comes at the very end of the novel when Naina begins to speak a 'garbled language' characterized by 'a rhythm mounted on Tamil, Malay and even Chinese words' (170). This composite language is described as a 'secret language, like the one we invented among ourselves when we were adolescents (driven by some frenzy for ritual privacy), with additional consonants and dropped vowels' (170). The esotericism associated with Naina's language suggests the appropriation of neglected, ghostly spaces within conventional linguistic boundaries for a more 'realistic' articulation of 'living' moments. In other words, it represents the actual multifocality of experience that fails to be included within the standard structures of language. Brewster explores Naina's language through Julia

Kristeva's notion of glossolalia which, as Brewster writes, is 'an irrational outburst of pre-linguistic rhythmic utterance that challenges the symbolic order imposed, in this case, by the authoritative discourse of "proper" English' (181). Additionally, it symbolizes the possibilities of language for isolated exilic coolie communities struggling to describe their migrational experience, in a balance between racial visibility, typified by an Indian culture brought from 'home', and racial commingling, exemplified by their new experiences in a multicultural society. Naina's language, thus, presents the coolitude ethic of 'cross-cultural vagabondage' that 'calls to attention "Indianness" in relation with "Otherness" as a premise which leads to a transcultural awareness' (Carter and Torabully, 168-194).

v) The Return

The climax of the *Ramayana* is Rama's return to Ayodhya, when his state of banishment and exile is dissolved and the triumph of a homecoming prevails. In places where coolies have been indentured, the text displays, as John Kelly writes, 'the capacity...to inform a new kind of self-consciousness, a Hinduism imagining itself in exile, longing for return' (329). This return, however, is not a simplistic, atavistic restoration of 'the thing left'. In fact, the journey of the return, if one considers it as a movement back to India, is perpetual where the moment of arrival is unattainable. Torabully's formulation of coolitude rests on the notion that India remains 'the land of impossible return' (207). In other words the return is not only metaphorical, but it is a non-deed, one that in actuality, can *never* happen. However, it remains a crucial feature in the diasporic imaginary because it keeps the past in focus.

What typifies this maintenance of the past is, as Vijay Mishra theorizes, ‘an impossible mourning of the moments of trauma’ (“Diaspora and the Impossible Art of Mourning”, 29). The impossibility lies in the fact that diasporic bereavement ‘cannot be delinked from trope, from metaphoricity’ and ‘can only dictate a tendency to accept incomprehension, which means leaving it as an absence’ (30). Mourning, thus, centres on an absence, a memory that is given meaning in the present summoning of a traumatic past, a past that is traumatic, in the coolie’s case, because of its ‘fall or fouling’ (Carter and Torabully, 203). Memory, then, for the diasporised coolie is ultimately a ‘trope of absence’ (Mishra, 30) that calls upon the spirits of the past to assist in the continual mourning of loss, the eternal return to that which is left. The danger, however, in this type of mourning is when ‘primal loss (of the homeland) cannot be replaced by the “new object of love”’, which then results in melancholy and the formation of ‘essentialist diasporic instrumentalities’ (Mishra, 36-37). *The Return* demonstrates both the memory of mourning and the eventuation of melancholy in its conceptualization of ‘the return’ as a trope for re-membering, reordering and renewal. What finally prevails is the multiplicity of beginnings that emerge as a result of the repetitive nature of ‘the return’.

vi) Periathai’s return

The novel begins with Periathai’s attempt at cultural preservation. A first-generation immigrant, she is burdened with the initial task of sinking her people into the soil, as it were, to expose them as real people living on real land. Therefore, she, above all the characters in *The Return*, understands the necessity of both re-membering the lost land and adjusting to the realities of the new one, an undertaking

that propounds the coolitude ethic of maintenance, alteration and connection, a balance between 'then' and 'now'. Thus, while the struggle to survive in Malaya typifies her existence where she did various jobs to earn a livelihood, she also generates strong memories of India with her 'elaborate prayers' and 'saffron-scented, death-churned memories, stories, experiences and nostalgia' (4-10). This kind of return stresses a reconsideration of the past and how it relates to the present especially in its projection of myths for the consumption of the younger generation. The stories Periathai related to her grandson Ravi and the other village children were of 'a land haunted by ghosts, treaded lightly by gods and goddesses' and her voice 'transformed the kolams into contours of reality and fantasy, excitingly balanced' (6-10). The myths of gods and of life in India provide a stronghold for the community because myth, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, is 'that necessary fiction that grounds the insistent specialness of the existent communal group' (57). These myths, however, are unique diasporic ones that maintain some essence of the 'original' stories but are necessarily altered by the process of migration. Shanthini Pillai, in her essay "A Portrait of the Imagination as a Malleable Kolam: K.S. Maniam", suggests that the kolam, which is an intricate design drawn at the entrance of Hindu homes to invite harmony inside, is a transformative trope for the diaspora experience with its malleable margins indicating the transitoriness of borders and the invitation of several elements into the spaces of the kolam. Thus, through Periathai's stories, the kolams themselves become confusions between 'reality and fantasy' (6) and challengers of temporal linearity with their invocations of both past and present. Pillai cites Steven Vertovec's description of change in the context of diaspora, 'cultural phenomena [are] continuously reproduced in discourse with social/economic/political surroundings. These surroundings themselves are usually in flux, so that the process of cultural

reproduction within such conditions often yields some form of modification' (*Hindu Trinidad*) and relates this to the specificities of the Indo-Malaysian diaspora where traditional forms like the kolam achieve different levels of meaning through processes of mutation. It is significant that during Periathai's funeral, Naina exclaims: ' "She didn't respect worm-eaten customs, she changed them!"' (137). This very mutation is manifested in a corporeal way, through the transmutation of her body's cells when she develops cancer. Zohreh Sullivan writes that 'the migrant's collision with a new culture or with the past...gets dramatized in scenes of mutation and metamorphosis as strategies to articulate the ambivalence, splitting and instability of migrant disempowerment and its agency' (140). This sense of disempowerment, which Periathai faced in her numerous encounters with the Town Council officials who came to reclaim the land on which her house was built, is closely linked to the morphing of her body: 'It was when the Town Council officials got to her that she began to lose weight' (8).

However, despite the desperate need to make her mark on the land, both literally and otherwise, she is still connected to the sea, thus suggesting the importance of both to her make-up: 'She blubbered most about the sea, crooning to it, beseeching for a safe passage with her tin trunks' (10). This is the sea that Torabully notes as crucial for the creation of diasporic identity, one that reforms as much as it preserves elements of India. Periathai's sea voyage is the 'traumatic and regenerating experience' (111) that he identifies as central to a unique coolie beginning, the trauma of which, as Mishra would have it, will always be mourned in metaphors and memories, emphasizing an impossible return.

vii) Naina's return

While Periathai's return to the past is typified by remembrance of Indian memories, experiences, rituals and the sea, her son's return is initially denied. After Periathai's death, Naina 'gave strict orders that the lamps, long-necked vessels and Nataraja weren't ever to be taken out of the trunks' (139). Rather than utilizing them for his prayers, these items are stripped of their functional value and rendered obsolete, fit only to be stored as dusty indicators of his mother's history, where they once served in her recreation of Indian spiritual life: 'Periathai opened one of the two tin trunks she had brought from India...she took out a statue of *Nataraja*, the cosmic dancer ringed by a circle of flame, a copper tray, a hand-woven silver-and-gold sari, bangles, and a *thali*' (5). Naina's concerns with economic prosperity, where he was more interested in expanding his laundry business than in understanding the meaning of his diasporic existence, allowed him the kind of cultural amnesia that R. Radhakrishnan views as typical of younger generation migrants. He warns that 'the older generation cannot afford to invoke India in an authoritarian mode to resolve problems in the diaspora, and the younger generation would be ill-advised to indulge in a spree of forgetfulness about "where they have come from"' (123).

In due time, however, Naina recognizes the worth of the vessels and begins to use them for his prayers. But the vessels exceed a mere ritualistic re-usage. They are fundamental for his sessions of 'deep contemplation' where 'Periathai's silver and copper lamps, the Nataraja statue and a statuette of *Saraswathi*' (153) marked the journey of the reconsideration of his past. For this return to the ritual vessels occurs when he gives up the purely personal drive to succeed financially and build a life of material merit, to return to the land, to an assessment of how the immediate land

features in his historical being. He thus ‘abandoned work, comfort and security for a hut almost at the fringe of the jungle’ (153). He begins to value the fertility of the earth, growing his own vegetables to sustain, from the land, the bodies existing on it. However, it should be mentioned that his resolution to revive the past through rituals and piety identifies him with a pronounced cultural retrogression. The river becomes his current means of self-purification as if he were by a holy river in the motherland: ‘Then, dipping the jar into the river, he poured the water over his body’ (164-5). In line with this type of return, are his mutterings about Gandhi and Nehru, symbols of India’s great political heritage. This return occurs almost as a type of repentance, where his initial forgetfulness of his cultural past is now replaced with a beckoning of Indian signifiers. Thus when he says that ‘ “I’ve gone round the world...but I always have to come back” ’ (168), the implications are twofold. Firstly, it suggests a return to an imaginary India where the act of going round the world alludes to the journey of financial gain at the expense of cultural neglect. Secondly, the notion of coming back hints at a return to Malaya and to the present after a process of cultural retrospection.

His cultural memory, however, does not remain ingrained in an immobile atavism because prior to his death he begins to create new trinkets to replace Periathai’s: ‘He fashioned his own urns, lamps, jars, and statues with many arms and faces, out of the clay he brought from the river’ (170). The ritual vessels are localized and although ‘he destroyed the trunks Periathai and he had acquired’ (170), the statue of Nataraja, the god of origination remains. He calls upon Nataraja to make the pebbles, clay and grass which he acquired from the land by the river ‘the clay and grass of my body’ (168), thus suggesting that the new land and the body have to achieve unity through the divine blessing of the ‘homeland’. Acculturation, then, never annihilates culture, it merely repositions and reconstitutes it in relation to its

environment. The objects with which Naina prays may have changed but the essence of his religious intentions is still fundamentally Indian. The way in which Naina amalgamates the old and the new echoes coolitude's proposition of Relation, where multiple fragments from memory and the living moment are pieced together to fashion new symbols of diasporised cultural identity.

It is significant that his return occurs at a point when another return materializes. During Naina's hard-drinking and financially-inspired days, he lived with his second wife, Karupi, Ravi's 'adopted' mother. However, as Naina returns to the land, he leaves Karupi whom he now identifies with monetary acquisition, '“You like the face of money...when you come I smell dirty money!”' (166), and resides instead with his first wife, Ravi's biological mother. This move from the mother of personal gain to the 'original' mother marks a symbolic transition from a rootless state of being to a desire to reconnect with the shards of roots brought along through the process of migration.

The Malaysian poet Wong Phui Nam's poem "Naina" which is written in response to Naina's turn to the land captures the complexity behind his new orientation. In a balance between the invocation of 'Benares, by whose waters the maimed in spirit come' (l.7) and the hostility of the new land which he describes as 'this indifferent earth' (l.12) where 'my sins here will not wash' (l.9), the only solution for the migrant Indian who is really trapped between these two orders, where his return to India is impossible because it is of 'another time, another sky and habitation' (l.6) and the return to the land of his new home is deemed unnatural or unwanted because his body does not 'naturally' belong to it, is purification through an elemental means: fire. In the novel, Naina claims this right through the burning down of his house, with him in it. The poem suggests that this is one way of redeeming 'the

demons in the flesh'(1.12), meaning the demons of the new land. Because, despite Naina's earnest attempts to locate a comfortable space in which to articulate his identity as a diasporised subject, he is unable to make tangible sense of his situation. This harks back to Mishra's notion of the impossibility of mourning in the diaspora narrative, where metaphoricity prevails over materiality in the process of memory which involves both an invocation of past and present. Thus, the meaning of Naina's existence is revealed through tropes such as Nataraja, the original symbol of his legacy, and several of Periathai's vessels which were not destroyed in the fire, only slightly altered by it: 'Nataraja, only darker, had fallen on his side. Periathai's tier lamps had survived the flames, one or two twisted by the heat' (171). In short, Naina's return to the past which he commingled with what the present had to offer, did survive after all, even if as mere metaphors for his condition. It marks the end of his quest for understanding his diasporised state but the beginning of his son's journey towards a kind of meaningful identification. Thus, the return never ceases, but simply repeats itself, through generations and through renewed notions of what it means to be an Indian in Malaysia.

viii) Ravi's return

Throughout the novel, Ravi displays an awkwardness concerning his past and his historical significance within his present setting. His inability to comprehend Periathai's and Naina's obsession with acquiring land reflects his disconnection not only with his cultural inheritance but with his condition as a diaspora Indian. His education in England further alienates him from his environment, thus eventuating in his lack of identification with his father's 'private dream' of reuniting with his

surroundings through an evocation of cultural symbols. He expresses disgust at Naina's new leanings: 'Why did my mother sympathise with Naina's backward dreams? He was afraid of a competitive world, where you were always tested, as I was' (156). His Cartesian reasoning thus works in opposition to what he deems as a 'primitive' retrogression that is, in the final analysis, unnecessary and worthless. Ravi's first instance of returning, which is also the most obvious and literal in the novel, is his return from England, 'the white man's country' (153). His return is acknowledged by Naina with relief: ' "I waited a long time for you...thank God you're back"' (151). This return, however, proves to be just as isolating for Ravi as his fragmented childhood days. He maintains a further distance from his family, his past and his history and renders his father insane in his efforts at creating some kind of cultural meaning. Ravi's attitude, like Naina's initial cultural forgetfulness, denotes the negative stages of coolitude's recuperative process. However, just as Periathai and Naina finally break through their various facets of denial and begin to lessen the distance between past and present, old and new, and therefore create a space or a potential space for a coolitude mosaic, Ravi redeems his cultural rejections at the very end of the novel by re-membering Periathai and Naina, 'I had not walked away from Naina, or Periathai, for they were still vividly in my mind' (172) and by opening up a new space of contemplation, one that revives Periathai's and Naina's efforts and adds his own to the ever-growing picture.

It is significant that this new space is in the form of poetry, a medium that is able to produce multiple meanings through its allegorical inferences, thus allowing for the kind of metaphorical mourning suited for diasporic discourse. The poem, which is dedicated to Naina, is titled "Full Circle" and has several implications. Firstly, it is the circle of the return which signifies a continual repetition and a full cycle of

remembrance which Ravi recognizes as crucial now after his cultural denial. He sees the inadequacy of words to articulate the real meaning of their existence as a migrant community, thus questioning the value of the textual world that he once deemed as solely important in establishing himself as an adult of worth: 'words will not serve/ They will be like the culture/ you refused at adolescence/...family prayers you rejected./ The clay taste/ the deep-rootedness/ you turned aside from' (173). He repents his disengagement from his culture and acknowledges that recuperation from this disjointedness can only occur in a silent, ineffable space, a space of the imagination, far from those words that 'imprisoned/ your flesh, your thoughts,/ feelings that rose to the wind' (173). Secondly, the circle is symbolic of coolitude's cyclical voyage, where the migrational journey is ever-present and is the reference point to which all diasporic sensibilities must return. This recalls the notion of the sphere as an archetypal shape in Dabydeen's *Our Lady of Demerara*, symbolized in the novel by the egg that Beth feeds her son with. The roundness of the circle 'exhibits qualities of indeterminacy' and therefore a limitless number of solutions (Harris, 48). In this sense, it provides the space for overlapping and interpenetration, an invitation for the mixing of elements. It is positive, then, that *The Return* ends with "Full Circle" because this indicates that Ravi is at the beginning of a new cycle, one that carries on from his father's and Periathai's, in an attempt to perceive both the 'cultural solitudes' that exist in the new land and the ways to overcome them in a space of fusion that is unlimited by the borders of language, tradition and rapid modernization.

b) In A Far Country

i) The text's motivations

If *The Return* mildly challenges the fixity of boundary lines, then *In A Far Country*²² intensifies this process and makes it its sole aim in the creation of an imaginary country. This country is one that subsists in the borderlands, a space that Gloria Anzaldua has described as 'a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition' (25). The borderland is manifested in the novel in several ways, the most obvious of which is architecturally. The verandah functions as an architectural symbol of interactive communication between boundaries where its place is transformed into a space of suspension. Ashcroft states that the verandah represents 'the surplus, the interstitial, outward-looking and, above all, dissolving boundary between the house, with its representation of permanence, solidity, tradition and continuity, and the outside, an outside bounded by the psychic line of the horizon' (193). Its position between the established structures of the house and the amoebic spaces outside of that allows for the meeting of strange and familiar elements. Thus, in the novel, the verandah appears at moments when the stranger seeks a placement. Along his many travels, Sivasurian, the mystic nomad, locates his position within the verandahs of random homes: 'I go and sit in the verandah of a house after miles of traveling, no one chases me away' (104). He tells the homeowners: ' "If you can let me lie in a corner of the verandah,

²² From hereon referred to as *Far Country*.

I'll be happy'" (104). His momentary belonging is situated in the horizontal space that the verandah evokes, through its inversion of inner and outer identities. Sivasurian's provisional personality therefore suits the corruption of normative habitation. Another instance of the verandah as a zonal reconsideration of borders is when Zul is unable to draw the line between the known and the unknown, thus confirming the purpose of the verandah as a metaphorical disruption of discourse : 'I stood in the verandah, my heart beating fast. I asked myself, "Is this my son or a stranger?"'(123). However, as Michel Foucault warns, architecture itself is unable to offer liberation from constrictions. He states that no matter how unrestrictive the constructs of a building are, the breaking of boundaries is an active application: 'it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom...liberty is a *practice*' ("Space, Power and Knowledge",162). Thus, in the production of liberating spaces, it is the *action* of freedom, rather than concrete places that generates spatial expansion.

Far Country proposes this extension through the transcendence of limitations that the borderland offers. Maniam uses various devices to achieve this state of transition, namely through the redirection of light, time and space. Paul Sharrad states that 'a major organizational device is Maniam's use of light and time as motifs that link the "disjecta membra" of the narrator's memory and connect the character's personal obsessions to general metaphysical questions about truth and appearance, about history as a series of discrete events versus the continuity of experience across everyday action and timeless epiphany' (xvi). The result is a sequence of hybrid moments that are non-chronological in nature, thereby subverting a sense of temporal cohesion. What is achieved is a new type of consciousness that comes from a deliberate cross-pollination of racial, cultural and metaphysical elements. Anzaldua has labelled this a new *mestiza* consciousness that 'constantly has to shift out of

habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes' (101). Subject-object duality is destroyed for the accommodation of contradictions and uncertainty where diversity is valued above all else. This mode is coolitude's evocation of the baroque element which 'embodies an "excess" of civilizations' (206), allowing for contact between diverse mental structures and visions of the world. Thus, *Far Country*, much like *Our Lady of Demerara*, proposes through performance, the possibilities of the second phase of coolitude, which is the construction of mosaic interplay and an egalitarian communication between elements of social existence, while bringing to light the Indian factor within this exercise.

In the novel, Maniam puts to use his theoretical musings in his essay "A New Diaspora", where he suggests that the new diasporic man 'occupies several cultural spaces just as he does several imaginative spaces'. However, cultural elements are initially subsumed in *Far Country* for a cosmological exploration of being. But this tendency is far from acultural because it is very much steeped in an Indian metaphysical tradition. The lack of distinction between subject and object, which Anzaldua proposes in her construction of a new *mestiza*, is firmly rooted in this tradition. In the novel, it is this tradition, rather than Anzaldua's formulation, that achieves greatest significance in its conceptualization of borderlands. This is because the novel, much like Indian philosophy, is concerned, first and foremost, with a spiritual system. Once this system has been identified, it is then related to historical and cultural issues mainly through the subversion of assumptions concerning light, time and space. *Far Country* invokes the Advaita Vendanta phase of Indian

philosophy to assess reality in its quest to liberate spaces. This phase questions notions such as cause and effect, time and space, self and other and Maniam utilizes them in his reassessment of national, cultural and social identity. The need for this reconsideration is based on the very lack of self that Ravi in *The Return* experiences. Similarly, Rajan in *Far Country* encounters an existentialist crisis that propels him to contemplate his position as a historical subject in a disjointed country. But his sense of historylessness acts as a stumbling block to this exploration, which is why his journey to the past has to begin with a revival of his family's historical beginnings. Naturally, this journey commences with the sea and its implications on his psyche.

ii) The past, the sea

Rajan's investigation of selfhood runs parallel to that of the nation. Just like his country that has not quite mastered the art of positive coexistence, where races still remain detached from each other's realities, Rajan is a rootless character, somewhat non-tellurian in his spiritual ruminations, ever questing for an impression of solidarity with his past and present. His deliberations resemble moments of revelation, where the meaning of his existence appears in occasional flashes from all temporal dimensions, and which finds elucidation in the most unassuming of spaces. The quotation by Proust that precedes the novel calls to attention the non-activity of epiphanies, where knowledge is attained almost by accident, without its subject's consent, but which ultimately proves to be more valuable than illumination in apparent light: 'For the truths which the intellect apprehends directly in the world of full and unimpeded light have something less profound, less necessary than those which life communicates to us against our will in an impression which is material

because it enters through the senses but yet has meaning which it is possible for us to extract'. Proust's words set into motion Rajan's esoteric considerations that occur automatically, as if controlled by a force external to himself. Thus, against his will, he states that 'my mind keeps going back to the past' (25). His father's stories of migration, the voyage from India to Malaya and the hardship of daily life in the new country, are vital components in Rajan's sudden historical and personal revisitations.

If Sharrad writes that the novel's 'ideal is not recovery of a country of cultural origin, but the discovery of a meaningful connection of the place one inhabits' (ix), then it must be asserted that the country of origin remains crucial even in the construction of that contemporary connection. The role of the original country is nostalgic in that it occupies a position capable of producing endless references to the past, usually as comparative points to present degenerate conditions. The decision to leave India was instigated by 'some colonialist's neat dream of acquisition' whose weak attempt to create 'an environment that was already prepared for their security and cultural continuity' (41) eventuates in a magnification of dislocation simply because the 'essentialist diasporic instrumentalities' (Mishra, "Diaspora and the Impossible Art of Mourning", 36-7) of the temple and the toddy shop reflect two kinds of desperation generated by the inadequacies of plantation life: alcohol and religion. Both worked as sedatives against the severity of life on the estates, testified to by the suicide of some women to end the 'eternity of repetition' (*Far Country*, 43). Life in India differed little from the new life, as Rajan's father informs him: ' "We suffered there in India. Now there is only suffering"' (7). This comparison is an important point in Rajan's attempt to understand his historical position in Malaysia. It calls upon the poetics of migration, discussed in depth by Dabydeen in *The Counting House*, and used by Maniam to generate a chain of causes and effects in the creation

of the Indo-Malaysian being.

Rajan's father's remembrance of his journey to Malaya takes initial shape in a contemplation of what the other land had to offer: ' "Through the open window I saw the stars up in the sky. Did they shine on a better land? Was there drought in those other countries?"' (5). This indicates the toughness in having to decide whether one's home is insufficient to sustain growth and development, and if so, then migration to a place unseen and unknown *might* offer an escape from the stasis at home. But the fact remains that these labourers barely had a choice in the matter because conditions at home were too dire for there to be options. Therefore, they had to cross the *kala pani* in order to survive in whatever way possible.

The next form of re-membering summons the aquatic symbols of the coolie voyage, where the ship and the sea feature as prime indicators of this journey, and the diabolical conditions aboard the ship allude to the trauma that the voyage evokes: "The ship we came in was crowded and foul. The hulls were rusted. When I drank water from the taps there was only a taste of rust. And the human dung- all over the place. The men not even closing the door. The door too rusted to be closed. The women with just the saris over their thighs, to hide their shame. Sometimes no water even to wash, to flush away the human filth'" (5). The journey symbolized, for the travelling coolie, a break away from the distress at home, especially significant for its mark as a new beginning, one that possibly also negates the negativities of caste (for most of the coolies were of the lowest caste and therefore would have preferred the dissolution of caste through the crossing of the *kala pani*). Rajan's father recalls how he hoped to reform the cycle of futility, but soon discovered that the cycle's futility was exactly what typified it: ' "Just cycle after cycle. Can't break the turning of the wheel. I tried. Yes, coming in those peoples' dung-filled ship, I looked out at the

water rolling past us. How vast and clear it looked! Going somewhere deep down. Had its own life. Our lives just small handfuls of dirt. Dropped into the ocean, they just disappeared''' (7). The ocean, thus, is the receptacle of both the coolie's dead and living dreams, the ones that were brought with him from India which pulsated with hope, and the ones crushed upon arrival in Malaya. The dead dreams, as the quotation above indicates, are returned to the sea, thus proposing the sea as a meta-symbol of the coolie's odyssey. This calls upon Torabully's notion that the sea voyage performed the creation and destruction of coolie identity, and therefore remains the most prominent trope for the entire migrational experience. It is no wonder then that Rajan's solitary initiation into the past is marked by oceanic inferences. At a point when he feels most disconnected, he suddenly notices the sea in a fresh and almost revelatory way: 'Looking beyond the road I saw, for the first time, the broken down embankment of the sea' (26). Following this, he muses: 'Why did I like being nearer the land than the sea?' (27). This question comes after the establishment of his historylessness, and his denial of cultural cohesion. He thus suggests that 'the sea, on recollection, seems to have been there in my blood, a phase in a forgotten evolution: that part of a process when the human spirit was lost in all the seas and the oceans and only yearned for land, for a home' (27). This indicates the censoring of the voyage because it recalled moments of trauma, when the spirit or verve of existence was annihilated through the ordeals experienced aboard the ship. Furthermore, the loss of land and the non-replacement of this loss transformed it into an obsession about acquisition at the expense of highlighting the centrality of the sea in the Indo-Malaysian diaspora. Therefore, the 'shiftlessness and the desire' that Rajan sees in his 'father's eyes before he died' (27) signifies the lack of balance between these two tropes as well as the negative position of the sea in the process of memory, where it is

unrecalled and remains a silent provider to the make-up of the coolie migrant.

iii) The spiritual system

Rajan's recollection of his metaphysical and historical beginnings is inspired by his egocentric present, where ambition and Western-oriented progress feature as indicators of success. However, associated with this kind of linear movement towards material gain, is a strict sense of hollowness which then causes a retrogressive detour: 'I've been, until a few months ago, a successful businessman with my own firm. But now I'm filled with a terrifying emptiness. Everything has come to a stand-still. It is as if I can't find the strength to go on. In fact, the opposite is happening: my mind keeps going back to the past' (25). The space of the past is wide enough to encapsulate events that address moments of revelation and openness, subversion and potentialities. It is the site of memory that unravels such depths and mobilizes them along a temporal confusion that finally becomes untemporal. He states that 'all this recollection seems like a futile exercise but which stirs certain feelings and recesses of thought that must have lain dormant within me' (23). These, then, are important factors in his current reassembly of elements that have been fractured along his path of progress. The selection of what to re-member comes from what the present moment needs or opposes. Thus, his first crucial personal memory, one that is disconnected

from his father's memories of migration, necessarily consists of the very temporal confusion that is capable of collapsing conventional boundaries, as this works to interrogate his assumptions about time that have thus far dominated his life choices. An experience undergone during childhood when he felt 'an otherness' that transferred him into a 'glazed state', negates time and place: 'There was no time; there was no place' (24). This absence is filled with a sensory reassessment that positions sound as the primary motivator of events, thus rupturing notions of normative experience: 'There came a muffled booming sound from beneath my feet...the sound, the boom, scaled and let scatter, layer after layer, a radiance the ordinary eye could not look upon' (24). Sound dictates optical reality in its corruption of material perception, where sight and sound usually work together to form coherence. Instead, it is sound that first and foremost shapes visual sense, an occurrence that defies time since the aural usually arrives after the ocular in the timeline of phenomena. What eventuates from this experience is 'an unimpressed and unmarked fluidity' (24) that captures all fragments in a non-dual space, a vision of unity that resembles the Advaita Vedanta propositions in Indian philosophical thought.

This school of Indian philosophy stresses that salvation or *moksha* is attainable through the discernment between true reality, which is essentially divine, where the self realizes that it *is* the greatest source of things, *Brahman*, and non-reality which is of this world. The self is thus non-different from this singular divinity, despite the appearance of splinters. The existence of fragments is in fact an illusory dispersal of this source through the reflection of the *Brahman* on the present world via *maya* which shields true knowledge. Segments of identity are therefore false and the motif of Advaita Vedanta is the transcendence of parts into the whole. The philosopher

Samkara reasons the unity of self through Upanishadic means: ‘ “If the individual soul were different from the highest self, the knowledge of the highest self would not imply the knowledge of the individual soul, and thus the promise given in one of the Upanishads, that, through the knowledge of one reality, everything is known, would not be fulfilled” ’ (in Radakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 605). In short, there is no real differentiation within the self which then implies the non-duality of all matter as everything comes from and resides within the *Brahman*.

Thus, the ego of Rajan’s quest for progress is merely a false reflection of the division between *Brahman* and *Atman* (the soul or the self). It is the realization of the absolute spirit which ends the seemingly endless creation of barriers and produces the seamless fluidity that Rajan experiences as a child. What hinders this actualization is the limitations of ‘body, senses, and mind’ (Radakrishnan, 605) which are all bound by a temporal-spatial impetus. Since there is only one infinite space, there can be no fractions, just as ‘the individual ego cannot be a part of the absolute spirit...since the Absolute is without parts, being beyond space and time’ (605). It is this temporal-spatial negation that concerns both Indian philosophical thought and *Far Country*’s spiritual system. For the novel is primarily occupied with the conceptualization of reality localized within a physical country that soon enough attains non-material dimensions through an interruption of time and space. It locates its interests outside of the chain of cause and effect, issues that are inevitably linked to time.

Far Country takes the coolitude mosaic to another level, acknowledging its positive existence, but seeing within its multiplicity, the possibility of a monotheistic spirituality. However, in a vision of this possibility, Maniam recoils from the celebratory, suggesting instead the difficulty in attaining this liberation from material impositions due to social and political limitations. During one of his ‘night visitations’

where he enters, as he states, ‘the completeness of a reality I deliberately shut out in the past’, he encounters several domes of ‘fluid steel. Fluid because it in turn is a net, a dome and the very cells of a collective mind’ (157). The domes each represent the main races of the Malaysian composite: Malay, Chinese and Indian. Together, they merge in a fluidity that allows for interconnections and which finally results in a ‘larger, parent dome’ (157). In theory, the unity of domes symbolizes the attainment of a calm homogeneity, one that does not accommodate the conflict of fragments but perpetuates their coexistence. However, because the realities of racial disjointedness are too glaring, the united dome acts as an agent of oppression: ‘...this dome...slowly begins to descend on me, like a press’ (157). Here, Maniam is commenting on the imperfect journey to salvation where the act of fusion fails to produce true unity because it is superficially constructed. Allegorically, the call for racial harmony is an empty hollering that disbelieves in its own goal for unification. Rajan suggests that the reason for this is the sloppy realization of self, dominated as it is by age-old traditions and rituals: ‘ “...these habits build up walls. They prevent us from knowing each other, knowing ourselves” ’ (157). Thus, the unity of self is of utmost importance where ‘the self, shaped by family, society, education and all that nourishes the ego, must be firmly put aside. One must escape from the prison of self-imposed or imposed upon order so that a new openness to life can be discovered’ (167). This openness, which is that of the infinite reality propounded in the Advaita Vedanta system, is a continuum, unbroken by time. Reality itself is reassessed and must be, as Radakrishnan writes, ‘one, non-dual’ because differences are really only ‘a make-believe of human thought which, like a prism, breaks up the pure unity into difference, where, in truth, the variety and the mind which knows it are both unreal’ (570-80).

This unity, it must be said, is not a sameness that dissipates coexisting realities, steeped as they are in cultural, social and political predicaments. Instead, it reveals that segments within a social mosaic *exist* but suggests that they belong to one source, and therefore differences are not antithetical to one another. They reside within a pure consciousness that is exposed within revelatory instants, when the ego-self is removed from the observing-self. This latter self witnesses the process of becoming which the absolute self is subject to. Bachelard describes this becoming, which he terms as (cogito)³, as ‘peripheral to the becoming of things...independent of material becoming...this formal becoming rises above and overhangs the present instant’ (62). The self, in other words, is conscious of itself in a state of (cogito)³ where, Bachelard claims, it is able to state: ‘I think that I think that I think’ (62). This distancing of the self’s selves invites a consideration of otherness where ‘we are conscious of ourselves as project, as pure project, transcended not by the world, the not-self, but by our own self, by difference latent within us, by the other that is our self’ (Bachelard, 62). Rajan practises this process of (cogito)³ during his night visitations when ‘the light I’ve been keeping in sight moves back into the distance as if it is an enormous, infinite eye, to watch what happens to my being’ (157). This separation of selves, however, is the product of *avidya* (ignorance) or *maya* and therefore ‘the witness self cannot be identified with the qualified *Brahman*, since it is defined as absolute, devoid of qualities’ (Radakrishnan, 602). In effect, Rajan recognizes that ‘the giving up of self’ (142), or rather the giving up of the ego-self, has to take place for a true knowledge of the self. And once this happens, racial communication becomes fluid, open and unbound by the strictures of time, place and tradition.

However, Maniam alludes to the difficulty of achieving this selflessness,

which in turn is the absolute self, amidst the existence of the diasporised self's hybridity, or more appropriately, syncretism. For hybridity does not seem sufficient for the production of diasporised identity especially since, as Roger Bromley articulates, 'the concept of hybridity [has] its roots in breeding and plant culture and nineteenth century racist discourse' (97). He suggests, instead, syncretism, which negotiates antagonisms and accommodates what Harris has called 'the miracle of a dialogue with eclipsed selves', that is, 'a reterritorialisation of otherwise deterritorialised and diasporic identities in a globalised world' (in Ashcroft, 97). In this new reterritorialisation, identity is fundamentally reassessed so that authenticity is never stable and hybridity is not an excuse for cultural diffusionism. The barriers between the two are broken by a *performative* ethic which comprises a production process that is never complete. This is the third space where neither being authentic nor hybrid is given priority but where contradictions persist in a vision of negotiation. More importantly for the diasporised Indian, this new space de-values the position of the body in social politics and defines identity according to more noumenal features.

Thus, *Far Country*'s spiritual system is not an end in itself but a means to an end; the end being an understanding of Indo-Malaysian identity within a national complex. Time, space and light are tools used in the quest for social and cultural liberation where spaces of racial exchange are revealed as endless and positive. This method is itself syncretic in its combination of psychical and tellurian subjects, one providing the other with a channel of perception. Most of Rajan's spiritual revelations concerning historical, multicultural and national existence occur through a kind of mystical illumination where he observes 'the light com[ing] into the room and mix[ing] with the brightness inside and becom[ing] indistinguishable' (1). Following this, he enters states that produce their own unique reality, different from that of the

physical world. Here, time and space are necessarily reordered in a process of discovering a vastness, rich with potential and non-divisions.

In his recollection of Mani, the sacrificial goat, Rajan elevates it to a position of spiritual success where the vastness in its look 'lay beyond man' and remained an 'incomprehensible mystery' (12). Its evocations exist within themselves, removed from temporal and historical situatedness, and generate an unknown, undefined esoteric origination: 'His bell tinkled, awakening memories that had nothing to do with the struggle for a living in an estate far from a motherland. Where did he come from? They bought him in a neighbouring estate but he came whole and fresh from the centre of a mystery' (12). Mani comes to symbolize a metaphysical inquisition into the depths of identity where categories of historical, racial and cultural selves are inadequate in the quest for an understanding of self. This harks back to the notion of the absolute self, or the *Atman* whose reality lies within the only reality, which is the *Brahman*; or in the case of the novel, an allegory of this absolute self lies in the conception of a locatable diasporic identity, in other words, the *Atman* of diaspora within the *Brahman* of existence which encapsulates all aspects of national life, indigenous and migratory. This journey into selfhood, which although is recognized within the novel as a cosmological matter, is necessarily related to diasporic realities such as displacement and deferred identity, which are urgent issues within the imperfect conditions of multiculturalism.

The most important example of this passage in the novel is Rajan's journey into the jungle to view the tiger, a symbol of Malay heritage and strength, which necessitates a fresh conception of self before inter-self communication can take place. This signifies another aspect of *Far Country*'s spiritual system, which is the revolution of the individual psyche prior to plural engagement. This facet finds its

roots in the spiritual philosophy of 20th century thinker, J. Krishnamurti, whose deliberations are in turn founded upon the Advaita Vedanta school of thought. Krishnamurti's belief that conventional relationships are based on superficial connections due to an incomplete assessment of the self, where the ego is seen as the sole self, is reminiscent of Rajan's desire to rid himself of that misconception.

Krishnamurti states: 'How can there be relationship between a man and a woman, or anybody, if one is ambitious, self-absorbed in that ambition, utterly self-centred?'

(22). As we will soon discover, Rajan seeks to answer this question during his expedition into the jungle, and finds an understanding of this dilemma when he negates all assumptions about selfhood. Coolitude's premise that in giving up the self, one does not lose the self, finds its place within this quest.

iv) Into the tiger

Krishnamurti postulates that to die everyday, in other words, to continually negate the past in order to free oneself from its fetters, is crucial for a perception of the self. He advises to 'have no shelter outwardly or inwardly; have a room, or a house, or a family, but don't let it become a hiding-place, an escape from yourself'(5). The journey into selfhood, therefore, is fresh and unbound by the very precincts that Rajan views as restrictive of development in its many facets. Time, tradition and history, or rather the lack of it, have thus far, in his predicament, impeded not only the ties between himself and his country, but between the variety of selves existing within his absolute self. Therefore, when his Malay friend Zulkifli invites him to view the tiger and he warns Rajan that ' "[we] have to free ourselves from thoughts given to us

by the past. Otherwise we can't move forward", Rajan replies: "I've no past" (96). This exchange between them already indicates the differences in their circumstances, and henceforth the type of experiences they will have in their pursuit to see the tiger. As Zulkifli reunites with his history, where the tiger stands for an emblem of Malay ebullience, Rajan is left rootless through an inability to connect with the animal purely because it is removed from his sense of the past and the present where his position as a diasporised Indian has not managed to integrate these two temporal segments. It is therefore apt that his experience in the jungle destroys all the normative boundaries of time and space, an allowance that engenders infinite time and space for a true vision of inclusion. The state that they find themselves in where 'time ceased to matter' awakens a 'primordial forgetfulness' (96) which signifies a kind of ancient death to the past and leads to a consciousness that best captures the spiritual self-awareness explored in the previous section where such a realization leads to a dissolution of the ego-self. Thus, it enables Zulkifli and Rajan to be 'strangely open to each other. He didn't say anything about his forefathers and I didn't even think of preferences and desires. We hardly said anything: we just went in motion' (96). The past then, and all its baggage, has been severed from memory and memory itself ceases to be important during this expedition. The mind, an entity heavy with notions and thought-processes that are antithetical to this new spiritual evaluation of relationship between the Malay and the Indian, becomes vacant where preconceptions are destroyed because they serve no purpose in the course of relation: 'The mind became quiet and expectant. It emptied itself of all its previous convictions and became, strangely, blank' (96). The mind, once associated with personal ambition and self-interest, has to be reassessed. For as Krishnamurti states, 'if one can look at it, go into it a little more deeply, self-interest, however wide it may be, however extended in many fields, has a narrowing

quality, a narrowing activity, a limiting, restrictive action'(25). It is this very limiting, restrictive action that Rajan and Zulkifli are attempting to transcend in the effort to exceed the barriers that exist between them because 'where there is self-interest, one would think there is the very root of this terrible nationalism, this division of people, of races, or countries' (Krishnamurti, 25). Therefore, in order for a smooth process of relation to occur, the mind has to be pliable because its elasticity signals an accommodation of innumerable elements. Coolitude's baroque poetics then is able to take place in the continual events of relationship where opacity, mystery and exchange are given ample space to manifest, being the consequence of 'a type of historical relation which has brought into contact diverse mental structures, modes of life, languages and visions of the world' (Carter and Torabully, 172). *Far Country* demonstrates a fusion of coolitudian and Krishnamurtian ethics in its projection of a spiritual negation of the ego-self that eventuates in pure motion which 'had a unity that couldn't be destroyed by ambition or self-centredness', thus inviting the formation of a kaleidoscope of components where 'the ground came up at us in intermittent mosaics of colours and shapes' (97).

The problem of extending this state seems to stem from the collision of symbols. For although Rajan and Zulkifli experience coevalness at some point during their journey, Rajan leaves that common identification to become a chameLeon , an obvious diasporic trope. Despite having exceeded his ego-self so that ' I am not myself anymore'(97), he does not 'enter' the tiger, the purpose of their expedition into the jungle. Instead, he states: 'I am not a man. I am a chameLeon . I see the world through a pair of eyes that never close. These apertures that are always open invite more and more of the world into the consciousness' (97-8). Truly inclusive, his vision and his very being are more suited towards multiple amalgamations where 'what is

outside those eyes, the skin, the nerves and what is inside are all one'(98), results in a state of empathy and negative capability. Akin to an artist who subsumes other personae and qualities in the effort to create endless freshness and understand otherness, Rajan corrupts the notion of spatially-split selves: 'I am the flower I brush against, the bark I scrape past and, finally, hitting those matted leaves below I become the veins through which run centuries of blood' (98). Subject-object duality is banished from this state, where 'you' and 'me', 'me' and 'it' are no longer measures of identification. Everything is united in a borderland of oneness and space becomes truly extensive and infinite. The chameLeon's ability to occupy several spaces at one moment and its blinkless perception of the world allude to a temporal-spatio continuum capable of acknowledging the process of relation. And because this process commences with the Indian migrant, this is the most profound moment of coolitude within the novel where 'from a mosaic stance...the coolie, or his modern alter ego, the migrant or the traveller, is engaged in the poetics of Relation' (Carter and Torabully, 212). For in the normative world where 'the temptation of reducing otherness to sameness is a constant problem in human relations', *Far Country's* baroquism provides the necessary opacity 'by being open to many *imaginaires*, to the irreducibility of identity to a monosemic construction' (Carter and Torabully, 173). Therefore, since the performance of identity, especially for diasporised selves, is ongoing and mutable, and happens as a dialogic event wherein seemingly anchored personalities are falsified for the process of instantaneous 'becomings', the chameLeon offers the most profound symbol of Rajan's multiplicity as an individual whose very identity is hyphenated. This symbol conflicts with that of the tiger. The latter is an ancestral point of reference for the indigenous Malay, and makes Rajan feel excluded from the tiger's antediluvian history not only because his history in the

country is relatively young, but also because his history conflicts with the history of the tiger. Thus, he approaches it through an absence of history because the tiger necessitates a total immersion in its history, something which Rajan cannot do because a true relationship between his chameLeon and Zulkifli's tiger, or between the migrant Indian and the 'host' Malay, has not taken place in the social, cultural and political world. He does not, in the end, spot the tiger because his process of perception is disjointed from that of Zulkifli who sees the tiger as an object to be conquered with his gun. This decision to hunt the tiger comes from the transition of time, after he has left the chameLeon -state: 'From dream-time I enter personal time' (98). In this new time, he states that 'though we still walk in unison, I seem unable to repeat the effortless co-ordination of the time before. Something has begun to intrude. Something moves within me as a kind of impersonal ambition. Like an amoeba, I want to gobble up everything that comes my way' (98). The imposition of ambition on this personal-time self interrupts the relationship between Rajan and Zulkifli, and consequently the viewing of the tiger. As Krishnamurti writes, 'to be really related to another is possible only when ambition, suspicion, competition, the sense of possession, with all their bitterness, anger and frustrations, are totally absent' (23). Thus, the reemergence of Rajan's ego-self where he is 'determined not to let Zulkifli get ahead of me' (98) dissolves all previous attempts to sustain an absolute self that is spatially and temporally open. Furthermore, Zulkifli's insistence that Rajan has to give himself up in order to become the tiger clashes with Rajan's desire to maintain a recognizable self, against the threat of complete assimilation into the tiger. Following this fear, he runs away when his 'personality threatened to dissolve into nothingness' (101). This action implies two things. Firstly, that Rajan's interchangeable migrant identity, always bordering on an assertion of the ego due to a lack of historical

grounding and a desire for modernization, requires some aspect of visibility for a racial and cultural marking in the country's make-up as his personal evolution mirrors that of the nation. Secondly, that the Malays cannot assume that assimilation is the solution to integration. What is needed is not the complete dissolution of self at the expense of sameness, but a creation of the absolute self, egoless and open to endless relation.

Thus, following this failed attempt at relation, Rajan revisits the realm of the tiger within his own consciousness. The journey eventuates from a realization that his arrogance had produced a seemingly disjointed system of belief for himself, laden with notions of material gain and personal ambition, one discovered through the exclusion of the variety of elements in his history and immediate surroundings that have contributed to his identity. The expedition begins with him being 'neither dead nor alive but floating in an in-between state' and his descent 'into some regions where ordinary living becomes unnecessary' is offset by 'an ancient effervescence that has defied time' (137-8). In this condition, where 'the border between the real and the unreal becomes fuzzy' (137), the mind once again becomes useless so that new experiences, antithetical to stale notions, are able to materialize in the creation of an imaginary, 'far country', situated in the jungle. It is significant that this transcendental event occurs in the jungle. Just as Dabydeen uses it as a positive space for the intermingling and breaking of boundaries, Maniam suggests its function as the site of correlation²³. This country is typified by inclusive clarity where a lidless eye emerges

²³ Maniam's use of the jungle space as a site of interconnection in *Far Country* differs from the notion of 'place' in *The Return*. While it was mentioned on p.121 of the present thesis that *The Return*'s concept of place was different from *Our Lady*'s positive appropriation of the jungle space due to differences in Malaysia's and Guyana's social make-up, *Far Country* demonstrates how the jungle *could* provide a site for building a coolitude mosaic.

‘so that nothing can be blinked away; nothing can be distorted’ (138), as well as by endless motion where the body ‘almost swings through the thickening trunks and creepers, towards a never formed centre’(138), recalling the interconnective roots of coolitude’s poetics. The setting is suitable for the final discovery of the tiger whose symbology Rajan soon realizes is different from that of Zulkifli’s. But apart from the physical situation, Rajan now understands that an intense concentration is needed on his part, which then leads to the erasure of self: ‘So obsessed am I with its nature that I forget my own personality. This, I realize, is the ultimate sacrifice needed to gain access to the tiger’s presence: the giving up of the self’ (142). This surrender involves a merging, a combination of the self and the other which then negates the old self for the formation of the new one, a process he likens to a physical metamorphosis: ‘it is as if the skin is peeling and my flesh merging with the flesh of another, the other’ (143). Consequently, he discovers *his* meaning of the tiger, which is not that of indigenous Malay culture, but the hollow, ego-driven tiger of his ambition: ‘I see now how I found a tiger for myself: in my attitude to my profession, the country and life. Unable to handle the abstract complexity of my existence in this country, I designed, at least tried to, an imaginary country’ (144). The lack of a meaningful connection with his surroundings, thus resulting in the assertion of the ego-self, prevented the process of engagement on all levels of national life. What the two episodes of his tiger-excursions signify is the existence of two types of imaginary countries. The first is a mental country, formed out of dislocation and historical abstraction. The second is a country of potential, the jungle-country through which Rajan discovers the inadequacies of the first. This is the country of infinite relation where normative time and space cease to be meaningful in the categorization of identity, and perception becomes inclusive through the ‘lidless eye’ that remains perpetually open in order to

accommodate all visions of the world.

v) Reassessment of traditional borders

Subsequent to his realization of the tiger-consciousness, Rajan enters yet another state of transition and discovery. Again, the site of this exploration is an imaginary country where ‘the sun shines...as in the real world...but it is a silent world, inviting contemplation and understanding’ (146). He recaptures incidents from his childhood in the new ‘far country’ through an interstitial condition in which his consciousness, neither purely mental nor spiritual but truly in-between, is the locus of perception. The centrality of Mani to these evocations is significant in that he represents the attainment of a vast space that is akin to a spiritual revelation. Light becomes an important tool in the construction of Mani’s otherness: ‘His eyes have become completely foreign: they are not animal or human. They seem to shine with a light of their own’ (152). However, it is not so much Mani that is the crucial point of this epiphany. Rather, it is the light that radiates through him that holds the power of perception: ‘The light is using Mani’s eyes as a medium to reveal itself’ (152). The light comes not only to symbolize movement, pulsation and life, but *actualizes* the living moment where habitual practices and traditions are left behind:

The currents are coming from a mystical source but uncorrupted by the habits my family and society have instilled in me, I see the light. It is the light of pure living. It is there shining all around and into me. There is no ego, no self-interest, no loyalty to all people I’ve known; only the desire to contain the light within me and take it out to the world. For it is the light of intelligence, not the darkness of the limited mind. For it is the vitality that keeps discovering; not the lack of stamina that keeps man enslaved to a family, a culture and a country. It is the light of total responsibility to life (153).

This light then, is complete energy, continually active, creative and open to all sources of life, and is perennially dedicated to the sustenance of mobility. It is always instantaneous, defying time in its shattering of the past and its insistence on an ever-

present. Through this light, Rajan begins to understand the people around him, namely Lee Shin his Chinese neighbour whom he was never able to fully comprehend, and his wife with whom marriage was merely a traditional institution and not a space for relationship.

Rajan's first acquaintance with Lee Shin²⁴ compels an ethnographic desire in him to study his new neighbour as a somewhat scientific and anthropological case. The study is an attempt 'to understand, in detail, Lee Shin's behaviour, thoughts and motivations' (29) where their cultures frequently intermixed, thus enabling Rajan to discern the other's traditionalism. The flute Lee Shin plays symbolizes his Chinese heritage much to the bafflement of his Indian ethnographer because Lee Shin's 'entire effort at the instrument reveals a total immersion in something the observer cannot, for the time being, put his finger on' (38). Not only is he distanced by the metonymical significance of the flute with its strange value but he is also perturbed by the material visibility of the instrument, its objectified prominence: ' [the observer's] attention is arrested by the flute's appearance' (38). Furthermore, 'the Mandarin inscription along the length of the flute...does not make sense' to him (39). The flute becomes a fortified signifier of racial division founded on a cultural hiatus that is engendered by the observed's puritanical attachment to China. Lee Shin's furniture, for example, was 'imported from China or Taiwan [and]...bore no relationship to the dull waking up every morning' (46). His authenticating trait is in contrast to Rajan who claims his apparent absence of a past: ' "I've no past"' (96). But perhaps the greater reason for his epistemological quest is Rajan's own pastlessness which prompts him to mentally appropriate the other's traditionalism in an attempt to

²⁴ Lee Shin represents the descendents of Chinese coolies who arrived in Malaya in the 19th century mainly to work in the tin mines.

configure a bridge between his individual existentialism and communal heritage. Far from projecting authenticity, Rajan's lack of faith in his 'Indianness' and his supposed detachment from any cultural hold instigates a process of othering the 'authentic' neighbour which consequently separates the observer from the observed, the 'rootless' fake from the rooted 'authentic', the Indian from the Chinese. Lee Shin's 'authenticity' also presupposes Rajan's lost 'authenticity' to which he might some day return. This play of identities between different races depends on preconceived notions of mendacity and 'truth' that are divisive and presumptuous.

This ostensible separation of racial selves based on conceptions of purity and non-purity is not a simple act of othering. Despite being the observer whose role is to classify and subsequently produce knowledge, Rajan is not removed from the outcome of this knowledge. For although he witnesses Lee Shin's social reality through a kind of colonial discourse, where the latter is 'at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible' (Gandhi, 26), Rajan discovers something of himself, a reflection of the other on his own reality. In retrospect, he wonders: 'What astonished me is that I didn't notice the similarities between Lee Shin and myself...how else can I account for my excursions into the country, at that time, in search of some elusive rootedness?' (40). It is thus their common fate as migrants whose need to make a tangible mark in the new country is imperative for collective sustenance, that makes Lee Shin a compelling case for Rajan. However, the two have expressed this necessity in very divergent ways. Lee Shin 'was trying to convert a country foreign by creating cultural landscapes and landmarks in which he could be at home' (162), whereas Rajan practised the opposite of cultural perpetuation by de-valuing history. It is ironic that Rajan appropriates colonial discourse as a method of authority for exploring his other where as Bhabha states it 'does not discriminate between a self and an other or a

home culture and an alien culture, but between a self and its doubles' (125). For it is through this discourse of imposition that Rajan realizes that 'I was like his alter-ego without whom he couldn't develop self-assurance' (162). In other words, there are no real limiting divisions between the two men, instead, they are attached through a mutual struggle to survive and this engenders all sorts of complexities, the most obvious of which is the position of the past in the immediate present. It is Rajan's lack of a past that makes Lee Shin, who is obsessed with retaining it, the perfect object of reflection. This space of invisibility typifies Rajan's quest for discovering a sense of himself. For as Bhabha continues, 'the subject cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it...so that the subject speaks, and is seen, from where it is *not*' (138). That is, the apertures in Rajan's constitution find their substance in Lee Shin's grounding. Thus, 'in place of the "I", there emerged the challenge to see what is invisible...the "I" in the position of mastery is, at *that same time*, the place of its absence, its *re*-presentation' (Bhabha, 125). Through Lee Shin, therefore, Rajan finds his representation which ultimately is an awareness of his failings as a diasporised subject. The most pertinent failing is his prioritization of progress at the expense of finding deeper connections and relationships with others. He philosophizes: 'Progress was another name for loneliness, for coldness between people' (126). The impetus that it generates in people is precisely the kind that Rajan utilizes in his sociological othering of Lee Shin, which in turn, suggests an imposition of his own will on Lee Shin's comprehension of reality. Thus, after his spiritual revelation of sorts, he comes to a clear understanding of his initial segregative stance: 'I merely intended to shock [Lee Shin] into realizing that fantasies and dreams weren't enough to sustain him. I didn't realize, of course, that by indirectly insisting on my approach to life, I was putting his values in the realms of fantasy' (166). Again,

the notion of undermining the ego-self with all its preconceptions is recognized as a crucial step towards the formation of profound relationships. Through Lee Shin, or rather through the reflection of himself in Lee Shin, Rajan is able to assess the links between the past and the present: 'At one time, I thought of the past as dead history. I don't think so now. The past is needed to make the present alive. But there must be no slavish or desperate clinging to the past' (166-7). Against his previous assumptions that sought to destroy historical value, he begins a process of conservation despite the vagueness of this journey's contents: 'I can't say exactly what it is I want to conserve. Perhaps it is the light I saw in Mani's eyes or the light in ourselves' (167). The living light is once again evoked as the necessary medium through which movement and endless connections are formed, outside of traditional borders.

It is only natural, therefore, that Rajan's next and final reassessment of stale boundaries is a gendered one, where the age-old binaries of male/female, husband/wife, father/mother are interrogated amidst an environment of ritual and convention. His relationship with his wife Santhi had always been superficial in that they were merely two actors within a traditional institution. Now that Rajan has seen the integrity of the living light and its necessity for the generation of relation, he arrives at a position of openness, ready to penetrate the shell of role-playing expected both from himself and Santhi. He states: 'I felt I had to understand her. After fifteen years of marriage, I hardly knew her' (168). His ambition to succeed in the material world impeded the evolution of their relationship, thus enabling her to throw 'walls around herself with her silence' (170). The silence here signifies the dutiful submission of the Hindu wife whose 'gestures and movements are the products of submission', but in Santhi's case, 'she has made submission the instrument of her protest' (170). The very need to protest indicates a situation of oppression, one that

Rajan knows he is guilty of perpetuating. However, due to the need to extend the living light, he recognizes that they have to begin again, as two individuals unfettered by assumptions and habit, and which becomes especially significant, as Rajan states, 'since my return [as] I've been looking at her in a new light' (170). This new light also allows him to see through the futility of rituals to which Santhi is still bound. During his home-coming prayers, he observes her and her sariied friends who 'clustered about her...[all] equally radiant' (175). The light that shines through them, however, is not the living light of Rajan's epiphanies, and which propels him to question it: 'Was it the radiance of those who merely follow?' (175). He understands that he too is subjected to numerous blind adhesions that come from a history of thoughtless tradition where even their children 'were the children of a hardly felt or understood ritual' (175). But he sees the root of this ritualisation of life in the course of forced containment where Santhi's 'was also a history of suppression' (175). This repression, he postulates, is cyclical through the act of propagation which pre-instills binding notions in the children that 'are conceived through a reaction to some domestic or social force outside themselves; they are not conceived from themselves and in themselves. The break is never made from the action-reaction chain so that children, it would seem, are already influenced at the womb stage to be someone thought of and taken measure of, premeditatively. Centuries of this disability passing through the veins and cells of women must have reached Santhi at a tender age' (177). The idea that conventional social relationships are produced in pre-social life suggests an endless existence of traditional barriers between people, whether within or without their respective cultural establishments, and in its very endlessness lies the hopelessness of the situation. Furthermore, cultural establishments, in the post-womb phase, reinforce the boundaries formed within the womb. Rajan recalls stories from

the *Ramayana* that sought to classify Hindu women within a stasis of duty, honour and fidelity: 'The [story] I re-member vividly and which bears some connection with my ideas about women's nature, is illustrated by Sita's willingness to go through the fiery test' (177). Slowly, he begins to empathize with Santhi and her plight within the discourse of subjugation and restraint. He sees this discourse as originating within histories that have emphasised purity above all else:

It strikes me...what women have been unable to do since they entered modern times. And modern times go back to those periods when men began to organize themselves into societies, shape kingdoms, monarchies, the reich, socialism, communism, democracies. To the times when these social systems began to oppose each other and go to war to uphold the purity of their visions. Then atavism came into existence, an atavism centred around the images of women (178).

Thus, the social being, conditioned by sectioned visions of supposed correctness, instigates and propagates the limitations of the self, which is essentially seen as purely social. The self, then, is not the absolute self of the living light that accepts ever-expansion and relation, but a one-dimensional self, seen through the habituated light that radiates through Santhi and her sariied friends. Therefore, in order to rediscover this absolute self, which is really already resident within the split social self, Rajan realizes that he 'had to discover some kind of language to talk with her. Or understand her language and destroy its limitation' (179). This quest for renewal necessitates a rehearsal of selves, a thorough interruption of habits that have built barriers between them. Much like Dabydeen, Maniam proposes that an outlet for this reinvention is the performance of sexual intercourse, which because it is essentially a movement and a coming together, allows, through motion, the possibility of change. Thus, Rajan states that 'when she came to me in the bed some of her habitual gestures were left behind' (180). Sex for him becomes a moment akin to his prior spiritual revelations, where the ego-self is dissolved, 'I didn't allow the consciousness of my self to dominate over my actions', so that 'there was an exploratory freshness during those nights of contact

between us' (180). The destruction of self, Maniam seems to be suggesting, is vital because in that act of annihilation, the self is actually extending itself to the other, which in turn strengthens the very concept of self. Thus, preconceived notions of each other are necessarily shattered; in other words, their old selves are subsumed by a new otherness in order to arrive at a position of profound inter-relation: 'we enjoyed being strangers to each other...more importantly, the ideas we had had about each other were destroyed by our coming together during those nights. We were equal and unknowable personalities in a world we could hardly begin to know' (181). This new mysterious world accommodates the metamorphosis of the self where impositions are disbanded and the real self is birthed out of the old skin: 'Those ashes had, over the years, hardened into a kind of second skin. But this acquired skin was beginning to crack and then crumble to reveal, beneath it, an unformed or misformed creature' (187). The regulations of form cannot function within this expanding, shapeless new self that now stands, as Rajan muses on 'some sort of common ground' (187) where husband and wife, male and female act out their engagements with each other. Both now desire to 'cross some invisible barrier into that other land where we could be fully ourselves' (193) and this urge is instigated, once again, by light, or rather the living light that has, by this stage, also encapsulated Shanti: 'The light expanded and enclosed her entire body in the silky shine of an unidentifiable newness' (192). Accordingly, they understand the need for a self-rehearsal, 'to be born again untouched by all the corruptions of man's history and ambitions' (192). Santhi then, as her husband before her, comes to a realization that her old self, which is really her non-self, has to be morphed where she states, ' "There was always this feeling that I lived inside the skin of someone I didn't know. My own self was somewhere far away"' (193). Consequently, she undoes 'the cross-stitches of her and my sari-

bordered life' in order to arrive at a space where 'nakedness that reaches beyond the flesh' (196) prevails. This space is yet another imaginary, 'far country', a 'white country of convolutions and convulsions', in which resides 'an endless landscape the ridges of which lead you into fresher and fresher valleys of discovery' (196). They have, thus, truly entered that timeless, spaceless state of Rajan's epiphany, which consists of a realization that human relationships can only evolve through an understanding of the self, where identity is continually rehearsed in the spirit of coolitude. For coolitude, as Torabully articulates, is 'a process of identity construction which takes into account the impossibility of putting a full stop to this task' (155). In this way, Rajan not only discovers fresh meanings of the self and how it forms identity. He also understands the position of this self in relation to the other, which he has realized do not need to be segregated, but can exist in a space where the two collide, so that one is perennially aware of, as Bhabha puts it, 'the otherness of the self' (63).

Chapter 4: Satendra Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* and *Lines Across Black Waters*

The Wounded Sea approaches the question of history through an exploration of its fragmentation with an intention to introduce a hitherto neglected history of indentured labour in Fiji. The insulation of the Indian world is highlighted to suggest an inadequate integration of coolies in Fijian society where certain chronotopes such as Indian epical texts and figures of India's political history attempt to define a fixed cultural identity. These symbols, however, work their way through a coolitude discourse wherein identity is negotiated through the 'ruins' of the Indian sphere as well as the Fijian one. The text extends this effort by mobilizing the landscape and the process of re-membering in order to align the material presence of nature with the cultural thinking of the island's inhabitants. Representations of interracial engagements somewhat conflict with the narrator's claims that prior to the coups, race relations in Fiji were harmonious. But this clash indicates an inevitability in the discourse of the exotic which is not a negative reminder of otherness but a healthy examination of radical difference. The novel's blend of autobiography and fiction provides a space for an expression of cultural trauma and suggests that the act of writing itself is a voyage through time and space, much like the coolie's. *Lines Across Black Waters* enters a water discourse and thereby examines the historical and cultural significance of the indentured labourer through a spatio-temporal paradigm that allows for the borderlessness and historical connotations of the sea to illuminate the coolie's poetics of migration. The poems stress the kala pani voyage and exercise coolitude's insistence on re-voicing the coolie by dissolving traditional boundaries such as those between the living and the dead. The text's restitution of history is most obviously manifested in its 'prophetic vision of the past' where Indian epical texts are interspersed with events in the history of Fiji.

a) *The Wounded Sea*

'All migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes- but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognize them, because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging'— (Salman Rushdie, Shame, 141).

i) The text's motivations

Torabully defines the indentured coolie as ‘the one who is without the text of his/her voyage, the one who needs to write the story of his/her passage/crossing’ (45). In the last two chapters, we explored the fictionalization of this second Middle Passage, or the coolie’s voyage, both literally and allegorically, in varying degrees and in accordance to specific localities. The escalating disclosure of the history of coolie indentureship in the Caribbean has made its narrativisation more plausible as a concrete facet of a multidimensional regional history. Dabydeen’s recreation of *kala pani* migration amounts to a new coolie script, one that had failed to be written in the past due to the silencing and subalternization of the coolie. As Maniam attempts to reshape the coolie through historical references as well as through contemporary cultural and political nuances, he reveals the corruption of interstitial identity by efforts at ethnic compartmentalization. In Maniam’s Malaysia, such segregation is symptomatic of racial engagement on both governmental and private levels.

It is interesting that Nandan represents an amalgamation of Dabydeen’s and Maniam’s attitudes towards history and its relationship to memory as well as to the ontology of diasporic life. For in Nandan’s case, the outcomes of his texts are always presupposed by an historical inevitability for the simple reason that history in Fiji, more so than in Guyana and Malaysia, has been crystallized. Jean-Pierre Durix observes that ‘Fijian-Indians have clung to fragments of their Indianness, which, because it was no longer a truly dynamic constituent of their everyday lives, soon risked becoming fossilized’ (in Ashcroft, 76). *The Wounded Sea* certainly exposes such self-containment, somewhat similarly to Maniam’s estate ghetto where both writers seem to share Naipaul’s ambivalence towards village life, and as Vijay Mishra

has sharply discerned, assumes a *girit* ideology²⁵ of repression. However, embedded in the text, are submarine mobilizations of history and lived space/experience that counter a monofocal cultural ossification. Nandan is careful to introduce this world, with its baggage of ‘bundles and boxes’, as one that perpetuates its apparent containment due to factors that are beyond communal determination, namely colonial, neocolonial and postcolonial policies of racial isolation. But rather than merely stating reality, he assumes the writerly role of illuminating interlineal engagements, both historically and socially, and proceeds to imaginatively reconstruct them through the hybrid form of his novel which is a blend of autobiography and fiction. In fact, Nandan is the most self-conscious of the three writers studied in this thesis in terms of the proximity between life and art where this propinquity is utilized in the redemption of history for the clarification of Fiji’s current political dilemma, following the three coups which took place in May 1987, September 1987 and May 2000. As the narrator of the novel claims, ‘Art really makes Life’ (5). In this sense, Nandan epitomizes coolitude’s emphasis on the linguistic creativity of writers in reassessing the temporality of a nation’s consciousness, that is their authorial skills in conceiving how the past, present and future shape national reality (which embodies aspects such as the social, the cultural and the religious). After all, it is in language, as Torabully claims, that the potential for rebirthing coolie identity is strong. Rey Chow affirms that ‘the act of articulating something moves and changes it, and therefore may cause it to disappear’ (104). While Dabydeen and Maniam push linguistic barriers through literary devices such as magical realism and onomapoteosis, Nandan’s prose is focused on memorial evocations and Walcott’s ‘celebrations of a real presence’ (“The

²⁵ *Girit* ideology is a specifically Fijian term, coined by Mishra, to explicate the nature of Indo-Fijian re-memembering and forgetting. This notion will be examined later on in this chapter.

Antilles”,68) in realist language that employs a particular Indian cultural ethic which calls upon traditional texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and spiritual philosophy such as *dharma*, *atman* and *Brahman*. This orientation finds its concretization in his poetry, but is utilized in his prose to manufacture an environment of diasporic ‘Indianness’ of which he insists ‘a genuine awareness...can be used to shape a profoundly relevant multicultural society that we here are so keen to create’ (*Paradise*,36).

‘Indianness’, however, is not an immobile concept in Nandan’s formulations.

Instead, it is:

A conception rich in diversity, reflecting the variousness of life, both physical and spiritual, and growing out of a civilization that is continually being enriched by the currents of many cultures, old and new. The Indian sensibility- that capacity within us that enables us to react morally and imaginatively to human situations and see what is significant from what is trivial- is conscious of its roots deriving sustenance from many cultural streams. The striking achievement of the Indian has been his ability to accept, absorb and integrate these into a vital way of life (*Paradise*,34).

This concurrence of ‘old’ and ‘new’ reflects Walcott’s suggestion of the ‘simultaneity of myths’ where he writes that the New World poets’ contempt for historic time allows them to ‘repeat to the New World...its simultaneity with the Old [where] their vision of man is elemental, a being inhabited by presences, not a creature chained to the past’ (“The Muse of History”, 37). This is precisely Nandan’s vision, which as a writer and a poet, he realizes he has to clarify for Fijian society simply because his country has fossilized history and, as a consequence, halted any kind of fluid intersocial engagement. What he is keen to emphasize in *The Wounded Sea* is the heterogeneity of the Indian diaspora which when placed in a national context contributes to cultural diversity. And latent within Nandan’s notion of cultural diversity is a coolitudian awareness of biodiversity.

At a symposium titled ‘Literature of the Indian Diaspora: The Caribbean’

organized by the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick on 22nd February, 2007, Torabully elaborated on the links between cultural and biodiversity as being a significant basis of coolitude's aesthetics. Implicit within this connection is the variegation of natural life, its endless 'becoming' resonant of Foucault's taxonomical evolutionism, but more importantly, the immensity of marine multiformity in the comprehension of fragmented histories and scattered realities. This is especially significant in the current age of environmental consciousness where the threat of species extinction and global change has catalysed an active panic for the preservation of life. Torabully suitably selects the coral as the leading metaphor for coolitude identity because 'the coral can be both soft, and hard, it can be found in two states, and it is traversed by currents, continuity open to new thoughts and systems' (152). This duality is further complicated by the head of the coral which is formed by thousands of identical polyps that operate as a lone organism through a symbiotic gastrovascular network. Additionally, each polyp generation breeds on the relics of the previous generations.

As a metonym for cultural diversity, the polyps and the coral to which they belong signify multiplexity within a national, racial, religious or diasporic entity, all of which overlap in a palimpsestic process. Tied in with the pertinence of the coral as a cultural allegory is its integrity in the prevalent battle against global warming where its ability to trap carbon dioxide within its limestone skeletons makes it a vital force in reducing the temperature of the earth. Unlike creolization's rhizome which merely indicates a complexity of roots that occupies a hybrid space where it is 'rooted but open to alterity' (Coates, 266), the coral by being an animal and vegetal amalgamation, is hybrid in *itself* and is not merely an *occupier* of a hybrid position. It possesses both 'agglutinating' and 'erring' qualities where it adheres to other coral

protective layers and liberates thousands of plankton each year. Thus, unlike the rhizome, it symbolizes the skeleton of fluidity. Moreover, it is a continually evolving being in its ability to adapt to external influences, thereby signifying its malleability, a feature which is particularly relevant in the discourse of migration and diasporic existence. Ultimately, it is the vitality of the coral to the condition of the earth which makes it a crucial trope both for natural and cultural preservation in circumstances where the environment and 'alien' residents are under threat.

For Nandan, this conservation is vital in national as well as natural life, where he conjures up the fate of Indo-Fijians as a corporeal one, parallel to a body undergoing a heart attack, while instantaneously acknowledging the contribution of the sea to a communal sensibility. Thus, aquatic images often accompany the novel's re-membering of the arrival of the Indians in Fiji. It is the sea that encapsulates and, to a certain extent, legitimizes the true movements between people, but alongside this oceanic inference is a consideration of airspace and the elastication of global interrelations, which in turn, expands and changes diasporic life. Subsequently, as the text re-members, it also disfigures the conception of an absolute India in order to arrive at a point where a diaspora dialogue may begin, that is, between Indo-Fijians, Indians from the 'Motherland' or elsewhere and Fijians, so that the heterogeneity of national existence may be highlighted. Simultaneous to an historical invocation, which is done in the novel through intimate childhood recollections, is a serious deliberation of meetings between cultures, performed by the collision or genuine acceptance between 'self' and 'other'. The dynamics of this interplay is actuated through an ontological awareness of the natural world, and in the case of Nandan's Fiji, this world is defined by the islandscape, with its inferences of isolation, self-sufficiency and the ubiquity of the sea.

ii) Ruins

Dabydeen's ruminations on coolie history in Guyana are founded on, as we discovered in Chapter 2 of the present thesis, a fragmentary assortment of official and unofficial accounts of the past where 'scraps' define the shape of coolie identity and its relationships with other social elements. Similarly, in *The Wounded Sea*, the inception of recollection mobilizes around miniature episodes that attempt to create originary moments. These temporal instants are not unlike Maniam's 'beginnings' that refuse an absolute creation but which insist on a primary acknowledgement of a racial and cultural history. Thus, it is important for Nandan's text to begin its story, not in a strictly chronological sense, but with a sharp centering of Fiji's dilemma: the racially inspired coups, their causes and their aftermath. The first coup was held on May 14, 1987 by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka who overthrew Dr. Timoci Bavadra's multiracial coalition government, claiming that there were ethnic Fijian concerns about racial discrimination. Following the first coup, the Queen of England's (Fiji) representative, Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, initiated negotiations between the Alliance Party (mainly comprised of Fijians) and the toppled government. The Debua Talks, as they were called, were intended to create a space for national unity. Rabuka, however, feared that the Indians would be given too much prominence in Fiji's political sphere and thus staged the second coup on 25 September, 1987.

In the novel, when asked by a radio reporter what his thoughts were as he was being driven to the military barracks by the gunmen, the narrator replies: ' " I was glad my father was dead "' (3). The implication here is that the greatest shame of such

political violation is the apparent redundancy of a country's beginnings, the arrival and subsequent contribution of the Indian coolies to the spirit of Fiji, which when neglected, places their presence in a death-space, where death is a better consolation than conscious reality. As we will later discover, particularly in Nandan's poetry, the binary strictness between life and death is relaxed for a radically creative and consequently redemptive exploration of spatial autonomy amidst a climate of autochthony where bodies are racialized in accordance to the material environment.

The novel situates the coups as the pivot of all deliberations concerning Fiji's fate where in the pre-coup phase, social segregation appears not only as a fundamental instigator of the coups themselves but also as a propeller in the post-coup dynamics of racial engagement. What characterizes Fijian social mechanics is a devastating sense of apathy. In a play between past and present, the narrator of *The Wounded Sea* connects both temporal factions in a reversal of victimhood. In the present moment, 'the headline in the newspaper lying on the next seat said: "They died instantly".

...Two prominent Fijians from the West were dead. ...It did not matter to me. I didn't know them. Besides, they were Fijians' (3). This apathy is sparked off by the narrator's memory of a Fijian colleague dismissing the deaths of Indians: 'I remembered how Litia Moses, one morning in the staff lounge of the University, told a Fijian colleague that a family of four had drowned near Suva Point. ... "But, they were Indians," Litia assured, in Bauan dialect' (4). It is with this aura of dispassion that the novel's passionate account of Fiji's 'ruins', parallel to Dabydeen's 'scraps', begins as a journey towards the comprehension of history and its crucial exorcism which also necessarily includes considerations of how the immediate environment shapes such a task. Thus, as the narrator comments on the historical, political, social and racial condition of his country, he must also refer to the island and its

geographical implications on the Fijian psyche. Edward Said, following on from Vico, positions geography and history side-by-side, where both are mutually reinforcing in the construction of national consciousness. In other words, the physicality of place is important in the psychical appreciation of space. This is especially significant in the case of islands where their natural borders already suggest an attitude of self-containment. As George Orwell once wrote, ‘the island mentality...repels both the tourist and the invader’ (“The Lion and the Unicorn”, ebooks@Adelaide).

It is, however, the tourist and the invader who occupy a xenophobic space within Fiji’s context where the country’s history of imperial travel, colonial policies and cannibalistic ‘other’ have moulded fears of exoticism²⁶ while also commodifying it in the process. Thus, what seems to be left are compartments of selves, depersonalized from a harmonious unit, and disseminated around the physical and psychological islandscape of Fiji. As the narrator looks back towards his village before boarding the aircraft to Sydney, he notices that ‘it was scattered amongst the sugarcane fields’ (3), as if such architectural dispersal is resonant of the diffusion of lives in the supposed nation-whole, overwhelmed as it is with the great ‘Sugar Machine’ (Benitez-Rojo, 67). With this in mind, Mishra’s reading of the ‘self-enclosed world of *The Wounded Sea*’ seems apt when he notices Fiji’s ‘black-hole theory of race relations in which self-sufficiency and gestalt replace interaction and mutual dependence. And in this crucial sense Nandan is never able to transcend the blanketed racial lebenswelt of the Fiji Indian’ (“Satendra Nandan, *The Wounded Sea*”²⁷).

²⁶ Exoticism is used here in reference to Victor Segalen’s ‘aesthetics of diversity’ which expounds the positive aspects of radical difference. This notion stands in opposition to a negative exoticism that solidifies the ‘other’ as an object of curiosity. Later on in this chapter, we will explore the extent to which an aesthetics of diversity can be applied to race relations in Fiji, both in its pre and postcolonial days.

²⁷ All references to Mishra’s reading of the novel will be taken from this source.

Nandan then, according to Mishra, is only ever able to speak about his own 'compartment' amidst the scatterings of other 'compartments'. But what Mishra fails to consider is that Nandan in fact subverts this austere division, firstly, by introducing segments that exist within his 'compartment', thus suggesting the heterogeneity of each 'compartment', and secondly, by subtly engaging several 'compartments' to illuminate the multiformity of the container (i.e., the nation) of those 'compartments'.

Analogous to this notion is the narrator's grandmother's philosophy of mud pots:

We're like the mud pot, *munua*," she would say. "God is in all of us- every living and non-living thing. I am the life visible and invisible, which, like mud, envelops everything that exists. We are like mud pots, *munua*, each different in form, shape, colour and name according to the things each contains or according to the purpose for which each is used. But each is permeated by the same stuff- mud, without which their individual existence is impossible...And it is mud that holds us together. Once the mud pot is broken, the air within, like our imprisoned soul in the body, is released and we become part, once again, of the divinity that envelops the universe and the minutest particle in it (51-52).²⁸

The heterogeneity of the mud pots is balanced out by the unity of matter that produces them. What is salient about his grandmother's musings is, first of all, a utilization of Indian spiritual philosophy to explicate universal ideas such as life and death, thus suggesting the applicability of an Indian sensibility not only to general issues, but to theories of race relations through implications of exterior difference (skin colour, racial features etc.) and interior similarity (spirit or soul, human anatomy), an idea already expounded upon by Nandan in an essay referenced earlier on in this chapter ("The Indian-Fijian: A Complex Fate"). Secondly, the mud pot

²⁸ The novel's pot analogy resembles Walcott's description in of the fragments of a broken vase in his Nobel speech, referenced in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Please see p.97.

philosophy indicates the ‘whole’ and its undoing through breakage (or death in the wider sense), thereby creating a multitude of fragments, or ‘ruins’ which are in reality united by the interior homogeneity, or the fluidity of air. However, heterogeneity is maintained through the multiplicity of particles that contribute to the whole, or divinity. Ultimately, the novel stresses the interconnections inherent in the engagements between ‘compartments’ through the metonymic implications of the sea: ‘The Pacific Ocean, part of the Indian Ocean, part of the holy Ganga...it was comforting. The sea is one’ (5).

Similar to Maniam’s invocation of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy to highlight the non-duality of *Brahman*, Nandan challenges segregative notions whether in identitarian or spiritual terms. However, it is the contemporary plight of division within Fiji that compels Nandan to assess the country’s non-unity or its duality through his own cultural lens. Thus, when Mishra writes that ‘Nandan avoids any real encounter with the Fijian Other because he has no unmediated access to it’, he brings forth an important problem in Fiji, one that Nandan is aware of but certainly does not condone: the lack of an interstitial and dialogic space. The reasons for this dearth stem from colonial days when every effort was made to separate the races. Paul Spickard in his essay “Race and Power in Fiji” affirms that ‘British colonial policies and the CSR [Colonial Sugar Refining] kept Indians and Fijians apart’ to the extent that after the country’s independence in 1970, ‘the two communities were strictly self-segregated. For example, the western end of the large island of Viti Levu—sugar country—is almost all Indian; the northern and eastern regions are almost all Fijian; Suva, the capital, had *de facto* segregated neighbourhoods’. Again, this resembles the Malaysia of Maniam’s world where meaningful interracial exchanges have not been made. The difference between Malaysia and Fiji, however, is that the Indians in Fiji, like in

Guyana, make up a close majority of the population. But unlike Guyana, and this time similar to Malaysia, the indigenous community was not exterminated as in the Caribbean, but has remained an important source of a traditional value system, albeit a metamorphosised one. This is precisely why Walcott writes that the New World, dissimilar from countries like Malaysia and Fiji, is devoid of ruins, and its poets are elemental, Adamic men who begin a rebirth of culture through an imaginative genesis (“The Muse of History”, 37). Ruins, however, are rather crucial concepts in the creative construction of the Indo-Fijian psyche because they signify the ways in which the old informs the new, and vice versa. As mentioned earlier, *The Wounded Sea* introduces these ruins through an island consciousness which encapsulates both the physical and the psychical, that is the geographically visual and the culturally determined.

As the narrator leaves Fiji following the coups, he begins the re-membering of fragments, or ruins that have formed the Indo-Fijian world from which he comes. These ruins subsist within a diasporic layering of sentiments where historical nuances of India co-exist with the natural immediacy of Fiji. At the narrator’s father’s funeral, Pratap the ‘mad boy’ mumbles ‘ “*Ram, Ram, Bhai*” ’ in the name of Lord Rama, after which the people who had attended the funeral head towards the fish vendors, signifying that ‘feasting after a funeral is...a Fijian way of life’ (5-6). Intertwined with Indian sentiment is a steady cultural structure, or in other words, the ancient incantation is performed through another atavistic entity and when both operate together, the ruins from each supposed independent sphere coagulate to create a new mosaic which eventuates in a negation of ruins but from which the mosaic is necessarily formed. However, before engaging further with this coolitudian explication of Fiji’s mosaic of ruins, it is crucial to explore the individual fragments

that contribute to this canvas.

In the narrator's case these singular sections begin with his father's history: 'My father was born in Fiji. His father had come from India- from a little, obscure village called Sultanpur near the Taj Mahal- under the indenture system. Slavery was abolished- at least on paper- in 1833; a new system had begun in 1834. My grandfather, who had never mentioned the Taj Mahal, had signed his *girmit*- he couldn't pronounce "agreement"- for ten years with the *coolumber*, the Australian overseer who called his number every morning as he reported for work' (6). Similar to *The Counting House*'s pragmatic introduction of the coolie indentureship system, *The Wounded Sea* states the arrival of Indians in Fiji as a vital beginning in the germination of a new Fijian society. But in keeping with the fragmentary nature of this society, the narrator's world remains insulated by certain images of India, held steadfastly by his father: 'To Father, Air India was the idea of India itself. India, for Father, was a grain of sand in an oyster: it troubled him, then crystallised into a pearl in his imagination' (11). It is simple enough to draw parallels between this comprehension of an exilic mentality and Rushdie's 'imaginary homelands'. In fact, it is Rushdie and Naipaul who seem to have been the most influential writers in the carving of the Indo-Fijian diasporic mind. In her piece "Islands: In my Mind" from the Indo-Fijian anthology *Stolen Worlds: Fijiindian Fragments*, Kavita Nandan writes that 'diasporic writers like Naipaul and Rushdie, Indian in origin, now living in the West, have written about home in ways that resonate with Fijiindian experiences of migration, dispossession and exile' (284). The very title of this recent compilation of essays and musings by a wide range of writers alludes to putatively complete worlds that have since, through historical and political means, become shards. Kavita Nandan explains the title for this collection: 'The words resonate on several levels. Firstly, in

the sense that when our ancestors, indentured labourers, were coerced into accepting the offer of “working” in Fiji and made the long and torturous journey over the *kala pani*, they were unaware that their worlds and lives were being silently and brutally stolen from them’ (Editor’s Note). The worlds have become, in the event of migration, memories and ruins, crystallized into a pearl in the imagination of the migrant. Thus, as this ossification settles, migrants like the narrator’s father and the local pundit Birbal, select certain images and notions to create a coherent picture of India, one that is of course adjusted to the migratory demands of imaginative reconstruction. The narrator’s father’s enquiry about world news necessarily involves a quiz about India: ‘ “Tek this grat noosepaper and read, boy. Tell me worl noose. What happenin in India? Gandhi king now? He gret man: too much reading he done” ’ (21). But his son’s pragmatic reasoning, symptomatic of later generation diasporans, enlightens the reader on the fabrication of the abandoned homeland in the psyche of the exiled: ‘How could you tell Father that Gandhi had died years ago, especially when, according to Birbal, Rama was still alive?’ (21). This psychical invention seems imperative in the face of perceived cultural dissolution. It acts as an exilic weapon with which the past can be magnified and the present warded off should it prove to be threatening. The diasporan’s imagining of India is of a concrete world based on seemingly arbitrary abstractions, a collection of residual globes from which certain tropes become pertinent. In fact, rather than mere tropes, texts like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* function as chronotopes from which the matrix of coolie time and space find their language.

Mikhail Bakhtin defines the literary artistic chronotope as a point within a community when ‘spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought- out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes

artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (84). In the coolie diasporic mind, epic Indian texts become centres through which definitions of the *kala pani* voyage and 'coolieness' come into being. These chronotopes then, which are similar to the symbols mentioned earlier on in this chapter, work through a coolitude discourse wherein the poetics of migration and the construction of identity are negotiated. Mishra writes that the *Ramayana*'s narratives served to mitigate the trauma of exile for the indentured labourers in Fiji because the country itself 'easily became the forest of Dandak in the Ramayana, a temporary state from which Rama and Sita would some day return. It was a perfect structure and Indians in Fiji responded to it with enthusiasm' ("The Feudal Post-colonial: The Fiji Crisis", 339). Thus, *The Wounded Sea* is littered with references to both epic texts. The narrator's memories of his grandfather, for instance, involve narrations of the *Ramayana*: 'I never saw Baba read but he had a reservoir of gripping tales from the *Ramayana*. His favourite story was of Ram's exile with Sita, his princess wife' (16). His father's conversations with Birbal 'would range from the *Ramayana* to the shining silver birds (aeroplanes)' (20), and when the narrator's family are deciding to buy him a new pair of shoes, Birbal is quick to make a parallel with Rama from the *Ramayana*: ' "Yes, yes, Bossie: Rama had *his* sandals. He leaving them behind when he gonna into exile. A noblest idea- already in the *Ramayana*"' (21). The construction of a temporal-spatio site from which Indo-Fijians weave a sense of themselves defies chronological order as these ancient tales bear an immediacy to their current lives. The texts act as Rushdie's 'bundles and boxes', or in the language of the present thesis, 'ruins' from the past which have remained integral to the building up of a diasporic world of fragments.

'Ruins', however, are not entirely positive entities in the labours of

reconstruction. *The Wounded Sea* often enters a Naipaulian discourse of negation where characters are caricaturised and village life is rendered with tragic humour. The dispersal of personalities across a spectrum of poverty and mock ambition in Nandan's text resembles Naipaulian characters such as Biswas and the people of Miguel Street. The pundit Birbal, for instance, is presented as a burlesque character, not only in his quack spiritual notions, but also in his pedagogical abilities: 'Birbal had come to us from India via Suva. He knew virtually no English- which, naturally, he was appointed to teach. Fortunately, he never taught, except when the Education Inspector came from Suva. Somehow he always knew a day before, and would give us all the questions and answers, which we had to learn by heart- every comma, every full stop' (40). Once his enthusiasm for 'teaching' runs out, he pursues a religious life, not with a sincere love of divinity but with a materialistic impetus: 'He was now a registered *pundit*, making more money than when he was a teacher. And with some knowledge of Sanskrit, he felt, he could easily "manipulate" a trip to Mother India' (44). The implications of Birbal's character are two-fold. Firstly, he represents the lack and instability of ambition in a place like Fiji where survival depends on a succession of petty jobs. The narrator's father's job at the international airport, for example, always seemed to be an important enigma until, as the narrator states, 'several years later, when my brother inherited the honour, we discovered that Father was the sole and chief person-in-charge of the international airport's rubbish tip' (20). Secondly, Birbal's presence represents the layering of Indians in Fiji, where Indians from Sri Lanka and India make up the heterogeneous Indian population, after the arrival of the indentured coolies. Either way, *The Wounded Sea* stresses the dissemination of worlds, ruined by colonialism and neocolonialism. In the first instance, the colonial divide-and-rule policy resulted in a segregation of cultural lives.

Nandan writes that ‘the tragedy of Fiji had been that the Fijians and Indian-Fijians lived in separate cultural worlds- it had begun with colonisation, migration, plantation’ (*Paradise*, 14). Thus, in the novel, the most feasible route out of such an exclusive predicament is to perpetuate it as a mode of defense against dissolutionism: ‘The Indians built their own schools and temples, mainly on the native lands. Then, among the ageing raintrees in the Natabua hills, the colonial government created the first secondary school for Indian children. There were already a couple of such secondary schools for the children of the Fijian chiefs- and their *mataqalis*’ (21).

In an environment of insulation, two-dimensional notions of the ‘other’ become naturalized and fortified by a disbelief, not in assimilation, but in co-existence. Racial insults prove to be the most blatant barriers between the races: ‘The bus stopped at the gate with a jerk, causing one Fijian lady to exclaim: ‘ “*O Sombo! Lia, Lia, Kai India!* (Oh, Stupid Indian!)”’ (90). In reverse, Nandan’s portrayal of Fijians, in line with Mishra’s argument, is generated from a predictable space laden with mysteries about the Fijian ‘other’. The Fijian world, the narrator admits, ‘like many others, has been full of cannibalism and colonialism, savagery and slavery, convictism and coolism, genocide and racism, religious bigotry and intellectual dishonesty, moral hypocrisy and political treachery- these ills have been integral to our seascape’ (137). Nandan offers a glimpse of redemption for Fijian society through the very seascape whose influences have been a synthesis of local rhythm and imposed ethics. Despite the narrator’s insistence that ‘this island was the last place to change [his grandfather’s] subterranean thinking: an archipelago, surrounded by more than a cannibal ocean’ (17), his grandfather’s adaptability to his new surroundings where ‘he had developed his own rhythm of life, like a transplanted tree among the native shrubs. His moods, it seemed, were controlled by distant memories as the tides

are by the moon' (13) suggests a consolidation of memory and the natural world as a means of survival and propagation. The translocated migrant, in other words, develops his/her language and bearings according to the immediate specificities available. And in the case of Fiji, those specificities are most often found in the geographical importations of the island, with its expeditious access to the sea. Nandan's quest in the novel seems to be a recomposition of 'a landscape of little ruins' (34) in order to understand the Fijian journey in all its elements.

iii) Islandscape

In an essay, Nandan writes that 'in a sense islands are exiles in the sea and the exile always dreams of the imaginary life on islands, especially after coups' ("*New Exoticisms* ,87). Following on from his portrayal of 'ruins', the notion of islands as exiles scattered in the sea implies an osmosis of material and ideological 'ruins' because islands, exiles and ruins are all incomplete entities, broken off from a larger frame. It is with this sense of detachment that the previous intimation of 'ruins' as fragments of lives, continues in the novel's formation of history through the disjunctions that the islandscape conjures up. For it is through geography, as Mohit Manod Prasad, states that not only are Fiji's 'place, cartography and scale' indicated but also 'its sights, smells and instances that are re-membered as a place of origin or a place to belong to for the Indo-Fijian diaspora and its removes by migrations and movements' (*Indo-Fijian diasporic bodies*). Thus, the process of movement with its cycle of departure, arrival and adaptation delivers an agitation that will never be satisfied in stasis. This migrational cadence is more akin to a chaos-monde which is, in Glissant's words, ' the current collision among so many cultures which catch fire.

push each other back, disappear, survive, fall asleep or change, slowly or at lightning speed' (in Bragard, 88). Although Glissant is referring to a Caribbean context, such impingements occur in most societies that have come into contact with forces external to themselves. In Fiji, history has been formalized around a mythification of the indigenous Fijians, indicating their portrayal only through a European lens. R.A. Derrick in his 1946 book *A History of Fiji*, thus states 'The history of Fiji, as indeed of any group of islands in the Pacific, must be written largely from the viewpoint of the European, for the period preceding European discovery is entirely undocumented, and there are gaps in our knowledge even of the nineteenth century' (2). In the novel, Ratu Reddy perpetuates this supposed absence in collective memory by factualizing it: '“The mystery of the history of Fiji and the history of the mystery is that no-one—I repeat no-one—knows anything about the arrival of the Fijians”' (26). Brij Lal's book on Fiji's history, *Broken Waves*, however, discloses otherwise. Lal states that 'early Fijian society was hierarchical and based on the principle of patrilineal agnatic descent' (4), thereby generating a picture of a diverse pre-colonial society.

In an attempt to restore history from a contorted space, Nandan uses the lateral and metaphorical signification of the island to display the ways in which, firstly, the natural meter of Fiji feeds into the evocation of the past. This meter encapsulates both the tempo of the sea waves and their relationships with life around them (in the case of the novel, as we will later discover, includes marine life and rock formations). Secondly, how the positioning and natural formations of islands affect the process of re-membering and its consequent impact on contemporary engagements. Nandan echoes Mohit Manoj Prasad's conviction that the island is a convergence of sea and land which then produces 'the irreducible third, the ineffable name, the metaphor'. The metaphor is certainly a tactic employed by Nandan to explain the hyphenated

condition of the coolie. His allegory for the coolie's situation is the sea where it bears reference both to the *kala pani* voyage and the South Pacific sea which are united in the novel's philosophical affirmation: 'The sea is one'(5). This is Nandan's most significant coolitude quality especially since, Torabully writes, 'the sea voyage was chosen as the space of the metaphorical construction of a new identity' (158). Thus, the sea contains the potential and Adamic vigour that Walcott claims New World poets possess. Nandan's attitude towards the sea embraces this inclusive originary sympathy and makes it a uniquely coolitude one, removed from a Walcottian analogy.

In fact, the novel extends the metaphor of the sea to embrace water in general. Chevalier and Gheerbrant state that water discourse brings to the forefront three themes: water as a source of life, as a means of purification and as a centre of regeneration (translation from Bragard, 83). When the narrator returns to the Nandi river, the course of its flow captivate his memorial eye: 'I sit on the bank...and peer into the water. The ripples stir like memories. The faces in the water rise. My mind races and the love of the flowing river fills the desolation of my spirit with remembrances like drops of rain...And fragments of my memory shine like pebbles where the water is shallow, swift and broken into bits by stones and stars' (73). Water produces a retrospective susceptibility in the observer, thus compelling him to reconsider the past and begin a process of resurgence.

In addition to the restitutive dimensions of water, the novel highlights its suitability to spiritual endeavours. Jagat G. Mahajan's prayer rituals are performed while he 'stood on his spindly left leg in the middle of the river...ululating his prayer, punctuated by "Oums"' (74). Birbal conducts the narrator's father's funeral rites as he 'shouted several "Oums" in the wind and hurled incomprehensible *shlokas* into the ocean' (55). It is through the incantatory spirit that the coolie's memory is first

provoked for it induces a remembrance of the repetition of water whilst on board the coolie ship. Thus, in coolitude's discourse, Torabully insists: 'Coolitude: to submit to the Word/ Without losing the memory/ Who yet re-members nothing...' (223). The 'Word' here of course carries several implications. The first being religious where utterance is the foremost and utmost performance of God, the material manifestation of an ideatum. The second is the resuscitation of word 'coolie', once condemned, now ready to be redeemed.²⁹ Thus, Torabully writes, 'My song is therefore coolie; my coolitude is my/ Only share of a memory tossed by the waves' (225). The waves thus remain central to the process of recovery. In the novel, the course of recuperation is accompanied by a recognition of divinity, once again discovered through the waves: 'I saw that the glory of God lay rippling in the silver-blue waves...voices for the past drifted into my consciousness, drowning the droning mantras' (39).

Included in the water discourse are marine tropes that imply yet another trait of reminiscence in the coolie. While the sea, because of its expansiveness, can, according to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, ' foreground historical trajectories of migrancy and dispersal' (18), aquatic symbols such as the coral and the conchshell represent a complexity that works in simultaneity with the borderlessness of water. The conchshell appears in the novel at seemingly random moments. In accordance with the rhythm of the breaking of a wave, the lines 'the sound of a conchshell' (40) or 'the blast of a conchshell' (44), precede certain instances of re-membering in the text. But beyond a mere conjuration of the past, the appearance of conchshells in the narrator's

²⁹ After all, as Ted Hughes states, incantation is an alchemy that brings about an activation of sorts. He states: 'That someone muttering a few words... be able to cure a sick cow or make a neighbour's house burst into flames is incredible. But that someone's prayer should affect the course of some other person's disease, is not so incredible—we call that "the psychological effect", "the power of suggestion" or even "the projection of healing energy"'

consciousness instigates a temporal continuum. Following the blast of the conchshell, the narrator pours ‘more pure New Zealand ghee onto smouldering mango twigs’ (44) in conjunction with Birbal’s mantras after which, he states, ‘the smoke swirled into my eyes, which welled with tears for the past or the future, or even the present’ (44). The non-distinction between the three facets of time suggests the destruction of a numerical conception of time, clearly demarcated for organizational ease. While it might have been the smoke that physically affects the narrator, it is most probably Birbal’s ‘Oum Shlokas’ that inspire the narrator’s expatiation of time, if one adheres to the notion that recitation contains the magic of change and telepathic synchronization. It is interesting that as the narrator chants ‘Oum Shloka’, he suddenly questions it, ‘Or was it *Amen*?’ (15), as if once his rational mind regains its consciousness after being drawn into a cosmological rhythm, it rediscovers its Christianiation. Benitez-Rojo asserts that colonial political Christianization resulted in the suppression of the colonized’s natural tempo. ‘That is why,’ he writes, ‘with its pagan noise silenced and converted into a simulacrum of what it once was, its signs would remain subject to a reduced number of rhetorics...that prearranged their differences, making them so predicable that from that point on they could be inscribed in the musical bar, according to the reigning notations and conventions’ (170-1). And although *The Wounded Sea* demonstrates the implications of religious conversion and Westernization as emulsifying the integrity of the Indo-Fijian diaspora, especially on younger generation coolies, the text also brings to light how a local rhythm has been maintained despite external influences. The dissolution of identity is countered by an intertwining of traditional faith and the natural world, a combination that amplifies the temporal continuum at the heart of a migrational sensibility. If history is a tangible set of incidents performed by real men and women

in a material environment, then in the evocation of a presently existing physical world, history is instantaneously recognized because in each actual act or engagement, the foundations of the past are already laid³⁰. Thus, as 'Nani's mantras mingled with the morning dew, the rays of the sun and the chirping of birds' (51), the geometrical deductions of place take on a spatial dimension, thereby producing a temporal-spatial acreage due to the localization of divinity and the endlessness of the incantatory spirit: 'The place really became sacred. Zhaman and I would touch the ground and the root of the mango tree with our foreheads' (51). The place only achieves its sacredness through an intimacy with the land, and from this personal benediction, the land will remain, in the past, present and future, a site of both cultural faith and the local environment. Natural formations like Joske's Thumb, for instance, 'shrouded in a miasma of heaten heritage. The jagged beauty of its rock faces, uneven as a rock-damaged edge of a sharpened cane knife' (109), represent how nature and culture come together where its natural shape mirrors a cultural tool like the cane knife, especially relevant in the Fijian plantation context. Later on in the novel, the narrator states that 'in the midst of the transient human world, only Joske's Thumb kept its primeval identity' (112). Significant marks on the landscape, by virtue of their solidity and age, become symbols of cultural strength and vigour.

As previously mentioned, Torabully draws similar parallels between nature and culture in his formulations of coolitude. His linkage of cultural diversity and biodiversity to define the coolie's coral identity stresses the paradigmatic resemblances between human and natural life. If coolitude is a poetics of relation

³⁰ Isaiah Berlin states that history is 'the sum of the concrete events in time and space—the sum of the actual experience of actual men and women in their relation to one another and to an actual three-dimensional, empirically experienced, physical environment' (17)

between a mosaic India and other diverse spaces where the coral symbolizes not only the cross-culturality of the two but also the interrelation of cultural diversity and biodiversity, then in the representations of the marine conchshell and the tellurian Joske's Thumb, the merging of sea and land symbols takes place to affirm the vitality of both to the construction of the identitarian hybridity of the Indo-Fijian.

Furthermore, the relationality between India and Fiji, the natural environment and the human world are strung together to produce a constant reinvention of what it means to be an Indo-Fijian. For Nandan, the Indian is already a heterogenous being. Like Torabully, Nandan recognizes the mosaicism of the Indian sensibility which, he writes, 'is conscious of its roots deriving sustenance from many cultural streams' (*Paradise*, 34). Thus, there is always a play between the various routes and roots (both carry cultural and physical connotations), and Nandan is very aware of such movements within the island. For him, 'those with a rare vision can see that living on islands we cannot forget that no man is an island' (*Paradise*, 42), thereby suggesting the importance of inter-elemental engagements within the physically confined space of the island where communities have to interreact. Latent within this concept of interrelation is the idea that history itself is a set of disjointed stories that must communicate at some point. These stories encapsulate all dimensions of life, both in the natural and cultural spheres. Thus, in an attempt to re-imagine history, its narrativisation cannot be singular, but should resemble the hectic collisions and harmonizations between *actual* men and women in an empirical, physical environment. This is perhaps why Nandan's text is polyphonic, with various characters assuming voices at various times to interject any monologic tendencies. The dialogue between the novel's actors can be linked to Iain Chambers' pertinent question: 'What if there is no past, but instead bits and pieces that exist in our present

not as traces, as residues, of a unique tradition, but as elements of different histories that are continually being recomposed?’ (102). As the text unravels the decay of ‘paradise’, it reveals the multilayered ontology of Fijian society which, following the coups, became compartmentalized fragments.

iv) ‘Paradise’ and Intercultural Communication

The historical image of the South Pacific has been a paradoxical blend of savagery and paradisaical desire. The initial utopian connotations of island life, removed from the grime and grind of civilization served as an alternative focus for those disgruntled with the cold rationality of the Western world. The notion of the Noble Savage, famously entrenched in the 18th century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau through the popularization of travel accounts, stamped the South Sea islanders as ‘Edenic creatures, unfettered by the lures of materialism, progress, and civilization’ (*Black British Writing*, eds. Dabydeen et. al, 334). Indeed, Fiji has often been represented as an Eden or a paradise which, as a consequence of colonization and cannibalism, degenerated beyond repair. Fears of venereal disease, savagery and, most importantly, the consumption of human flesh, soon extinguished any dreams of Arcadia that the South Sea islanders provided for the white man. Nandan writes that ‘the horror of cannibalism destroyed the brief but splendid vision the islands of Polynesia had given to the white man, a vision of what it might be like to go naked in the world once more: Paradise lost was to be regained in the South Seas’ (*Paradise*, 94). The idea of literally consuming another human being seems to have settled in the Fijian psyche. Of course the eating of the ‘other’ in contemporary Fiji has assumed a

metaphorical cloak which, Nandan seems to suggest, is the pivotal cause in the destruction of Fiji's paradisaical nature. But what is interesting is that *The Wounded Sea* attempts to stress the lack of cannibalistic desire in Fiji's postcolonial and pre-coup society. But this dearth is a camouflage of a subterranean consumption impetus that, as we will later discover, erupts in episodes of political violation. The subterranean quality manifests itself as a 'blind-spot' on the 'other'. In other words, Nandan's descriptions of Fijians remain within a two-dimensional frame, where Mishra states, Nandan 'avoids any real encounter with the Fijian Other because he has no unmediated access to it'. But the narrator maintains that

growing up in Fiji, on the banks of the river Nandi across from a Fijian *koro*; we village children all swam together, grazed other cattle on the same fields, ate the same stolen coconuts, pawpaws and watermelons. My parents sat and drank grog with Fijians every night and ate from the same plate. There was Lesu, Blooma, Kini, Laisa, Anna, with whom we swam in the Nandi from dawn to dusk. Matalita, Ilmeleki, Solomon were the names of some people with whom my paternal grandfather, and my parents, joked, laughed and worked (138).

While the text may claim this, the world of the novel remains very much an insulated one. Its portrayal of Fijians is minimal, and when executed, borders on the tragic comic³¹. The narrator's brother, Nini's, relationship with a Fijian girl, Anna, for example, is presented not only as a curse, but the Fijian characters involved in the separation of the two lovers are somewhat burlesqued. Anna's brothers, Lesu and Blooma (possibly the same Lesu and Blooma with whom the narrator used to harmoniously swim) explode in anger upon discovering that their sister is pregnant with an Indian man's child. They chase Nini with a cane knife and a spear until he makes his way up a coconut tree from where he 'spattered Lesu's face with a handful

³¹ While it is true that some of the Indian characters are also portrayed in a similar way, the representation of the Indian world achieves a three-dimensionality (which is absent in the Fijian sphere) through the novel's extensive coverage of Indian culture, politics and history.

of shit' (99). Blooma receives the final insult when, as the narrator states, 'my beloved brother managed to squeeze another handful onto Blooma's surprised and open mouth' (99). The incident ends with Lesu and Blooma humiliated and mocked: 'Lesu and Blooma rubbed their faces with sand, and cursed and cursed and cursed' (100). Insight into the antagonism generated due to an interracial relationship is prevented by the unavailability of the Fijian voice, trapped as it is in a farcical and stereotypical domain.

Yet, even as the novel fails to amplify the Fijian perspective, it firmly insists on the fluidity of engagements between the two races because, above all, peace and harmony are valued: 'The country, popularly known as the Cannibal Isles in colonial mythology, has miraculously managed to remain peaceful under severe, bullying, and violent provocations. That speaks for the resilience of the people of Fiji. I hope this remembrance of things past, flawed and fragmented though it is, will give the reader an impression of a loving, little country' (147). It seems clear that the nature of memory is central to an enquiry as to why the aperture between a didactic, theoretical claim of mosaic interrelations in Fiji and the text's inability to access this claim, exists. The novel was written with a sense of betrayal where the coups signify, for the writer, the disintegration of a communal bond. Evocations of the past are already filtered through this sentiment of injustice.

Thus, what remains is an attempt to re-member a disfigured country with imaginative tools that are themselves scarred not by an absence of contact with the 'other', but by a *misunderstood* relationship with the 'other'. Thus, the representations of Fijians in the novel are contained within this flawed comprehension and are thrown into the realm of the exotic, which according to Kateryna Longley, 'because of its ability to change positions has the capacity for parody and the carnivalesque' (24).

From his present post-coup position, the narrator creates a world in which the Indo-Fijian historical fragments indulge in a polyphonic relationship, while the Fijian shards are left in a memorial fixity. The novel presents a constant struggle between the decorum of memory (how and what to re-member) in an imaginative reconstruction of the past and how that affects intercultural communication. For if the narrator is correct in saying that ‘we knew so little of the history of the Pacific. History was unimportant to us’ (153), then surely the compulsion to recreate history under traumatic circumstances produces a battle between accuracy and artistic license. And if Nandan states that ‘it is...only when one is thrown out of paradise that one begins to re-imagine it’ (*“New” Exoticisms*, 87), then the pertinent question is, what sort of paradise is being re-imagined and whose paradise is it?

At this point it is imperative to acknowledge that the recreation of history is fundamentally a reinvention in language where linguistic location and expansion determine the capability of expression and the lens of perspective. Stephen Slemon rightly states that

since language mediates the way in which we see the past and the traditions that inform the present, we have to pay attention not only to historical content but also to the “lenses of language” that bring it into focus; and the extent to which we are able to see history as language, as discourse, as a way of seeing, or as a code of recognition is also the extent to which we are able to destabilize history’s fixity, its givenness, and open it up to the transformative power of imaginative revision (159).

If history in Fiji has been dominated by a European and Fijian hegemony, exemplified by Ratu Reddy’s statement that ‘ “Indentured Indians don’t make history”’ (26), then Nandan’s task is to reclaim this negated historical space by *magnifying* the coolie dimension. In line with coolitude’s assertion of coolie memory prior to the mobilization of the social mosaic’s elements, Nandan’s text is primarily a crucial effort at restoring the coolie’s past through a linguistic reality. As the novel performs this, however, the second phase of coolitude which is the relationality of

diverse fragments, is subsumed not by personal prejudice but by political upheaval. But before we explore the lack of an explicit Fijian world, it is vital to understand Nandan's historical approach.

Foucault and Hayden White view history as a culturally motivated and ideologically contained discourse. Indeed, as *The Wounded Sea* recovers the past, it is clear that Indo-Fijian history reposes in a set of beliefs modelled upon a retrospective India. The narrator's early education in Indian tales indicates the intensity with which images of India settled in the Indo-Fijian imaginary. His grandfather's stories about elephants provoke him to ask, ' "Why are there no elephants here?"', to which his grandfather replies, ' "Elephants wouldn't live on our islands. The land was soft and they would sink into the ground"' (18). Subsequently, the narrator states that 'I...dreamed of elephants often...My country had only wild boars and mongoose...From fragments of fragmented lives, this is the dream that the old man, my Baba, gave me: to see elephants where there were none' (18). Elephants, signature animals of India, represent for the narrator, a fragment of the fragmented lives of Indo Fijians and dominate not simply his diasporic construction of India's natural life, but the creative imagination of the Fijian one, interspersed by hallucinatory elephants of an ancient India. Baba's stories of Ram's exile easily latch onto the narrator's diasporic consciousness: 'In Ram's story I saw our Fijian Indian lives mirrored. And I began to understand the myths on which our civilization was founded' (16). As the narrator grows up, popular Indian films add to the traditional narratives to form a structure of 'Indianness' within his migratory mentality. His love for Karuna is filtered through the image of an Indian actress, Nirupa and, no doubt, along with this influence of Indian cinema is a collection of Indian belief systems, rooted in an atavistic culture. As Birbal stresses, ' "Girls from India are different...There's

tradition, culture. It's in the films'" (86), as if notions such as tradition and culture cannot exist in a diasporic situation unless completely derived from the Motherland. Mishra describes the Girmit ideology as a fossil that 'retreated into its memories of a prior narrative which was itself an uncritical glorification of a mythic past, with its sexism, racism and caste ideology intact' ("Satendra Nandan, *The Wounded Sea*"). Indeed, as the novel demonstrates, racial memory is always retrospective rather than introspective, that is, a static attachment to set narratives as opposed to a creative reconstruction in a temporal continuum where the past is treated simultaneously with the present and the future.

The various Indo-Fijian voices in the text enter a dialogue of such retrospective inclinations with characters such as Baba, Birbal, Sukul, Jagat and Gautam approaching their 'Indianness' through residual globes of India, concretized in their imagination. Gautam, the Legislative Council barrister, for example, travelled to India for his education, but his loneliness does not stem from homesickness, rather an infiltration of Indian film into his soul: 'He looked lonely, more due to Hindi film songs than missing Fiji' (84). His marriage to a native Indian woman evokes pride in his father, Jagat, because 'his son was marrying in Delhi, and a graduate too—a matter of great honour. A daughter-in-law from the land of Gandhi Mahatma' (85). Echoed in Jagat's reverence for all things Indian are sentiments from characters like Birbal and the narrator's father who maintain a steady adherence to canonical Indian images and values. When Gautam 'found the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* useless and meaningless in the South Seas', Birbal stresses that 'our whole civilization is shaped by such timeless epics. My father, he lived in the *Ramayana* age here. You'll need to live the *Mahabharata* of the mind, you know'" (114), indicating the ideological construction of an Indian sensibility, something which Gautam is still

unable to fathom as he transfers his incomprehension to a radicalization of the 'other'. His marriage to an ideal Indian bride, Joan, is violated as he explores avenues of sexuality beyond his own race. His affair with Pauline, a European woman, is affected by a cultural and racial curiosity from the very beginning. Her fascination with Gautam stems from an exoticisation of the historical connotations of his name, something which he himself is ignorant of. She urges him to read the novel *Siddharta*, a book that has captivated her. Subsequently she says, "Perhaps that's why I fell in love with you, my Gautama. Come now and enlighten me" (120), at once displaying the eroticization of difference. Longley asserts that the interchangeability of the exotic position permits its association with 'the explicitly erotic or pornographic body' (24). Thus, as Gautam attempts to come to terms with his identity in Fiji, of recognizing what his 'self' is in relation to the 'other', he analogises this task to conquering Joske's Thumb, the symbol of Fijian primeval identity. Dominating this natural formation can only occur, in his mind, 'by fucking Pauline on its topmost ledge' (112). But later, when 'Gautam wishes he knew a bit more about his history', he is immediately drawn to the 'white birds flying just below Joske's Thumb' shortly after which 'his left eye caught...a black and white picture of Gautam and Indira Gandhi' (120). The thread of connectivity here between fucking the 'other' as access to the 'self', a local rock formation and a visual symbology of India's political heritage suggests an Indo-Fijian position: a diasporic identitarian quest includes a recognition of the local and the inherited through a play between 'self' and 'other'. By attempting to understand the radically different 'other', the self's own estrangement is revealed. Kristeva asserts that 'as the symptom that renders our "selves" problematic, perhaps impossible, the stranger commences with the emergence of the awareness of my difference and concludes when we all recognize ourselves as strangers' (6). Thus,

through accessing the 'other' and always failing to understand it, the 'self' soon realizes that that failure is indicative of a universal strangeness in *both* 'self' and 'other'. What the process of exoticism provides for is, as Segalen states, 'a creative mediation, via a perceiving self, of what is outside that individual's sphere of knowledge or experience' (35). Segalen's view of exoticism is a positive one because it values the element of surprise and therefore, constant reinvention, in the dynamics of relationship between 'self' and 'other'. Fundamentally for Segalen is the position at which the exotic stands, removed from imperialistic affirmations of the centre. By blending the scientific and the imaginary, he defines the word 'exotic' 'in its clinical context of exodic nevers where stimulus moves outwards and accordingly reveals a fundamental notion of motion away from the centre towards periphery' (29). Contrary to criticism of the exotic in postcolonial studies, the rehabilitation of the term is a crucial step towards understanding the very concept of relationality which is integral to both creolization and coolitude. For in relating, elements are continually giving and receiving in a state of mysterious awe as alterity is emphasised upon engagement. Ron Shapiro rightly suggests that 'the exotic is not something necessarily false and evil, some cancerous creation of the mind, but is part of the ordinary mental process of the construction of alterity' (42).

Thus, *The Wounded Sea*'s brief encounters with the Fijian 'other' may appear as two-dimensional exoticisations, but they signify a very real situation in most multicultural societies: representations of the 'other' are always going to be based on notions of alterity, of difference, of the exotic, and will never be complete because the very nature of inter-elemental encounters disallows it. Indeed, as Glissant writes, Faulkner's black characters will never be 'full' men because they were created by a white man (*Faulkner, Mississippi*). But far from negating this aspect of relationality,

Glissant encourages these 'black-spots' by proclaiming their ability to continually present newness. Thus, even as the Indo-Fijian world remains in supposedly insulated fragments, its engagements with the Fijian 'other' have influenced its germination and evolution, most blatantly in its linguistic reality.

The text is interpolated with Fijian and Hindi words which are italicised to stipulate alterity. The unreferenced words and phrases indicate an ostensible defiance of perspicuity and prefigure Ashcroft's proposition that such a stance is expressive of the articulator's contrariety: 'I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience' (75). Thus, Birbal speaks using a composite lexicon that amalgamates English, Fijian and Hindi words: ' "Paandit Birbal understand only Sunskrit and Englishee. Every Satday he gonna library. Ayna paandit jee? *Wongo kai India misnaarie*, muster"' (37). Boundaries between the utterable and the ineffable are ruptured within the transformation of the English language which attains its climax in the conglomeration of 'lived' and 'textual' language. It also becomes clear that language is always topical, and for the Indian migrants in Fiji, exposed to polyglossia, language is a heterogenous Babelian performance. And if we view history as language, where language as Torabully claims, 'has the ability to recall the past and the present simultaneously' (183), then through the reinvention of language via encounters between 'self' and 'other', history itself is being readdressed and subjected to an imaginative reconstruction. While the Fijian 'other' may be incomplete in the text, his/her presence in the novel's language, indicates the other's ghostly existence as 'the stranger [that] threatens the binary classification deployed in the construction of order' (Chambers, 6). And as the novel performs its linguistic passage to the *exote*, where its engagement with difference acknowledges how the stranger and the self are

singular bipolar entities, it also hints at the formal philosophy of the novel, with its awareness of the transformative powers of writing itself: ‘to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory, sometimes sign-posted by generic indicators, but everywhere characterized by movement: the passage of words, the caravan of thought, the flux of the imaginary, the slippage of the metaphor, “the drift across the page”’ (Chambers, 10). The autobiographical and fictive blend of the novel indicates how authorial self-consciousness and generic experimentation expose a desire for reformation and an expression of cultural trauma, which the novel concludes, emerges from a betrayal of the exotic.

v) Formal Hybridity

If the exotic is represented as a positive assertion of radical difference, where the inability to pragmatically compute the other’s structure signifies not a loss but an enrichment of diversity, then the dismissal of this right to an emphatic appreciation of divergence, especially in a multiracial society, eventuates in a national dilemma. Fiji’s predicament, as the narrator passionately repeats, germinated from a conspicuous manifestation of a refusal to embrace not simply an aesthetics but a cultural-politico strand of diversity. The narrator and Nandan (in his numerous essays on the Fijian situation) often stress the sacrifice of the Indians on behalf of the Fijians: ‘I’ve not known any country where a migrant race, which came not as colonisers but as victims of colonialism, did so much to protect the indigenous way of life’ (*The Wounded Sea*, 137). In this sacrificial light, the ‘the two coups in Fiji, one on May 14, 1987 and the more fatal one of September 25—the first imprisoning the coalition out of government; the second forcing many Fiji Indians out of the country itself’ (147),

symbolize a disenfranchisement of an understated solidarity between the races. Thus even after Colonel Rabuka, who staged the coups, held the multiracial 'rainbow' coalition in hostage, the interstitial thread that bound the races together presented itself through multilingual prayer: 'We began to pray before every meal. First in Fijian, then in Hindi, and then in Urdu and then I would pray in English' (152). The last section of the novel, "The Night of the Mongrels", is the most explicitly autobiographical because it describes the first coup from the perspective of the Minister of Health who was present during the coup and who, in fact, was Nandan himself. The detailed account of the events is a chilling reminder that the narrator's descriptions are not a mere imaginative creation but a concrete rehearsal in words. While the narrator of the previous three sections may well have been a confluence of fictive and real characters, this ambiguity is diffused in "The Night of the Mongrels" because Nandan's voice emerges as a pristine, ubiquitous force, determined to render his story from an introspective and analytical stance. In her book, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore suggests that trauma is a suitable space for a reconsideration of generic boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, the real and the imagined. Because the self has been injured by trauma, it no longer projects the 'I' as an egotistical subject but as one that requires, firstly, a memorial site and secondly, a recuperative space. We are here reminded of coolitude's key tenets: coolie memory and coolie rehabilitation. Through the fictive and autobiographical hybridity of the novel, where the first three sections signify coolie recollection and the last section represents a recuperation through confessional words, Nandan displays his coolitude inclinations.

The convalescence of the Indo-Fijian plight is located, for Nandan, through the act of writing. Trinh T. Minh-ha states that 'writing, like a game that defies its

own rules, is an ongoing practice that may be said to be concerned, not with inserting a “me” into language, but with creating an opening where the “me” disappears while “I” endlessly come and go, as the nature of language requires’ (in Chambers, 11). It was evident from the previous section of the present chapter that the ‘I’ of the novel often clears space for several ‘I’'s, thereby creating a polyphony of voices. The ‘I’ in the “Night of the Mongrels” however germinates from a testimonial site and attempts to recover itself through a disclosure of the actual plurality of the ‘I’. In other words, the autobiographical ‘I’ is the starting point of narration but assumes a collective ‘I’ when it begins to explicate communal trauma. By, firstly, recreating the coup and secondly, stating its consequences, Nandan attempts to find a redemptive location for Indo-Fijians. Where do they now belong? What is home to them? But more crucially, who are they?

As the second coup instigated a significant Indo-Fijian migration mainly to Australasia, new definitions of identity are imperative. Nandan’s departure to Australia compels him to view Fiji as a ‘bleeding unhealing wound’ (168), and the novel does not offer any conclusive solutions to the Indo-Fijian predicament. What it does manage to suggest is that ‘if Fiji has not yet slipped into barbarism, it is not for want of trying on the part of some; it is simply that the ordinary people of Fiji have refused to be misled’ (168). But Nandan later states solemnly that ‘political apartheid is likely to become the Fijian way of life. In a sense, it is more terrible than the South African variety: we in Fiji have known freedom and living together’ (169). This despondent attitude is echoed by Mishra who claims that ‘if the Girit ideology was a consequence of a repression based upon unfulfilled expectations, if the Fiji Indian could be cured only by a political act which would legitimate his/her existence in a land to which he/she had been banished, then the Fijian rebellion effectively brought

an end to that possibility' ("Satendra Nandan, *The Wounded Sea*"). All that remains, Nandan and Mishra seem to suggest, is the shipwreck, despite the cross-culturality in the postcolonial Fijian world. But the shipwreck, Nandan stresses, functions on a political rather than a socio-cultural level. Thus, as he is imprisoned by Colonel Rabuka's soldiers in Borron House, he reminisces on the first shipwreck experienced by indentured Indians in Fiji at Nasilai Reef 'where the *Syria* carrying indentured Indians to Fiji was wrecked, on Sunday 11 May 1884 at eight-thirty pm' (161) and associates it with the fate of Indo-Fijians following the coup: 'Once again the *girmit* grandchildren were shipwrecked; and once again they had been totally unprepared for what was treacherously hidden in the paradisaical waters of the South Pacific, with no hope of any rescue taking place. By an irony of history, today too was a Sunday in May' (161). In both cases, the imposition of imperial designs on the coolie altered the patterns of cultural elaboration, and more often than not, encumbered it. In the first instance, Indian indentureship generated mass migrations to places unheard of by the coolies. Therefore, upon arrival, cultural preservation was a key tactic for maintaining a sense of distinction from other 'alien' social elements. Intercommunal communication, however, effected many modifications to the cultural baggage transported from the Motherland. While these changes were the result of social interplay between the races, the Indo-Fijians, as we have previously explored, still preserved a degree of insulated 'Indianness'. This process of cultural modulation is typically diasporic enough, where the shipwreck is a point of reference for the migrant but never an all-consuming feature in his/her daily existence. However, the coups signify not merely a return to the shipwreck but a magnification of it, thereby reminding the coolie of an original memory of exilic dislocation. This is precisely why Nandan maintains a parallelisation between coolie indentureship and Fiji's racial

coups because both bring up issues of displacement, survival and betrayal: 'Our grandfathers, coming from those old, moth-eaten villages of India, didn't know how to swim; that is why so many drowned. We in the present didn't even know how to fire a gun' (161). The historical quiddity of the Indo-Fijians was additionally dissolved by the aggression of political violation where 'soon after the coup, the *Girmit* Centre, which had been opened by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was occupied by Fijian soldiers, boots and all' (160). What was once a symbol of coolie arrival and perpetuation, which housed relics of the first shipwreck, became a target of the second shipwreck. Focusing mainly on the shipwreck, Walcott warns, causes not elation but cynicism and solidifies in a climate of nostalgia and rejection. Thus while Nandan maintains a close proximity to oceanic inferences, thereby keeping in line with coolitude's emphasis on the sea voyage, he is still occupied with the shipwreck. But this preoccupation has to be understood in its context. If the second shipwreck had not occurred, then perhaps the original memory of coolie migration and exile would not have been such an amplified obsession. Censorship of the space of the initial fall is entrenched, in Fiji's case, by censorship of mosaic interrelations between the races. In this sense, Nandan, like certain aspects of Maniam, represents the transitional phase in the history of coolitude of which Naipaul is the pioneer. For what Naipaul represents, according to Torabully, is a battle of paradoxes where he is 'caught between colonial representations and the necessities of modernity, pointing to the possibilities of facing the complexity of the situation, and underlining the attitudes which prevent the emergence of a liberating attitude to the mosaic *imaginaire* of cultures and civilizations' (206-7). Nandan's complex situation is foregrounded by colonial and neocolonial sectarianism, where the official inclusion of Indo-Fijians in the national mien has never been adequate or complete. Even the country's name has failed to

describe the Indian presence. The coups have extended the complexity of Nandan's circumstances, thereby making his task of demonstrating Fiji's mosaic *imaginaire* tougher.

But this dilemma does not signify an end to Nandan's full embracement of coolitude's aesthetics, merely its hesitation. This period of halt is one of reflection and analysis of the contextual complications. As migrations begin again for the *girmitya*'s grandchildren, the issue of the voyage once more becomes important for these twice-exiled coolies. Many Indians left Fiji after the second coup in 1987, hence performing a rehearsal of the *kala pani* voyage, where sentiments of fear, betrayal and sorrow become primary expressions of their experience. However, despite the harsh reality of banishment, analogous to a Ramayanaesque world, Nandan possesses a vision of convalescence both for the coolie victim and for Fiji in general. The novel highlights many episodes of cross-culturality, evident at a social level. The multilingual prayers mentioned earlier are intertwined with a multireligiosity during the ministers' imprisonment: 'Jo or Kalon would begin in Fijian; after that the PM would read something from the Bible; then Fida would recite a Muslim prayer; then Harish in Hindi, and finally I'd be asked to say my piece in English' (152). Furthermore, interplay between the races is established in the exchange of food: 'We had a very affectionate relationship, sharing our roti and curry in exchange for pawpaws, coconuts and bananas' (144). But in the event of racial betrayal on a political level, the confirmation of social multiformity is replaced by a diasporic consciousness, which Nandan sees as the only possible site of redemption once intercommunal engagements have been left somewhat redundant. In his essay "The Politics of Dispossession and Exile", Nandan writes that 'perhaps one way of possessing a stolen world for migrants is through the diasporic consciousness. I believe the diasporic

experience is an ancient odyssey in modern history' (*Paradise*, 99). What is gained from this awareness is a sense of mobility and plasticity through which the migrant continually discovers his/her identity in relation to the home(s) (plural in the case of many Indo-Fijians) and the home(s) gained. Additionally, numerous particles or elements that are constantly moving and meeting in the course of diasporic actuality and sensibility illuminate the multifariousness of life, akin to the implications of biodiversity. Thus, what eventuates is a consciousness of global interconnections. In the novel, Nandan affirms Fiji's place in this process of linkage: 'They say flowers bloom in Hiroshima and bird songs are heard in Auschwitz. Fiji, too, is a link in that chain of being and becoming. No colonel can enchain a country of its conscience' (147). Similar to Chaos Theory's explication of the seemingly random causations of certain occurrences, Nandan's 'chain of being and becoming' highlights not only ongoing movement but the importance of *all* elements, regardless of size, to the evolution of one another. Thus, while Hiroshima and Auschwitz may appear thoroughly disconnected, the result of bird song in the latter due to the blooming of flowers in the former, engages the two in a dialogue based on a chaotic principle but one which makes them necessary to each another.

In the same way, by placing Fiji in this global chain and inviting the uses of a diasporic consciousness into its self-definition, Fiji's predicament becomes infused with perpetual growth and inter-national exchange, thereby opening spaces for a clarification of the multiplexity of racial, social and cultural life. With the expansion of communication in today's age where airspace and digital space have allowed for borders to be broken, such interspersed involvement seems an undeniable reality. In fact, one could argue that the Indo-Fijian's second migration is defined by airspace rather than seaspaces, thus reinventing the very voyage itself. *The Wounded Sea* often

makes references to various airlines such as Qantas and Air India, and the presence of ‘the shining silver birds’ (20) in conversations between the characters implicates a reborn migrational desire. The novel, after all, begins in an airport. Of course on the flipside of the coin, the advancement of technology also means the emergence of a touristic cannibalism, especially in a country like Fiji, popularly described as a ‘paradise’. But as Nandan affirms, ‘the idea of paradise keeps its stubborn grip on the psyche of many: some subliminal search for the primitive innocence that vanished from the centre of civilizations, now rediscovered in the idea of tourism, the panacea for many ills’ (“*New*” *Exoticisms*, 80). Thus, the vital issue here is to embrace the ability for interconnection which air travel has provided by valuing the traveller above the tourist for the traveller, according to Segalen, has ‘a particular sensitivity to the nuances of otherness experienced in contact with other cultures’ (27). The diasporic mentality is in keeping with the traveller’s sensibility simply because the diasporan is himself a perpetual traveller, much like the writer. For Nandan then, the recuperation of the Indo-Fijian is firstly acknowledged through the fluidity of his diasporic existence: ‘One is no longer searching for the identity of a rooted tree. Identity and home are more fluid, more uncertain’ (*Paradise*, 104-5). Secondly, the act of writing, which is also a migrational event, produces a redemptive, confluxial space: ‘in writing one re-reads life...in Fiji I had believed that the true artistic imagination would see the possibilities of reconstitution and restitution in the fragmentation of an historical voyage across the seven seas—new roots, a new language, a new mythology, indeed the creation of a new world with bits from the old’ (*Paradise*, 117-121). The voyage, thus, provides the pivot and the momentum for reinvention and, which, when remembered through words, relives an ancient odyssey in a modern world.

b) Lines Across Black Waters

i) The text's motivations

If *The Wounded Sea* experiments with generic boundaries in order to unveil the pertinence of the text in recuperative efforts, then *Lines Across Black Waters* expresses its healing urge through metaphor. The very title of Nandan's collection of poems indicates an inscription on the *kala pani* as a textual and allegorical rehearsal of the voyage. In the case of the poems, the lines that are 'written' across the black waters are ideological attempts at rediscovering the lost coolie. Moreover, 'lines' do not only imply linguistic constructions but also denote demarcations and, more importantly, the coolie barracks. Thus, in a more explicit fashion than in *The Wounded Sea*, the poems prioritize coolie memory and thereby exemplify the first phase of coolitude. Torabully associates speech inventiveness with the vivacity of poetry, and suggests that poetry is perhaps the most suitable form of coolie expression simply because it is metaphorical and strange by its very nature. Inherent in poetry is an element of baroqueism, whether in form or content, and this then allows even a poet like Nandan, whose poetry is far from experimental, to construct an identity which is an aesthetic blend of complex cultures and histories. In this way, the poems at times echo coolitude's anti-classicism which stresses 'a type of historical relation which has brought into contact diverse mental structures, modes of life, languages and visions of the world' (172). Indeed, as the poems recover coolie memory, history is revealed as a complex continuum, open to an interplay of temporal facets, and modes of life are exposed as being interfused with components of death, thereby illuminating the cross-

pollination between boundaries.

Nandan utilizes the ancient Indian epics to claim their relationality to the Fijian social and political world. This method not only emphasises the hybridity of Fiji's cultural context, but it also suggests that re-narrativisation is both historical and contemporary. Just as in *The Wounded Sea* Nandan synchronizes the *kala pani* shipwreck with the metaphorical shipwreck caused by the coups, the poems draw parallels between an initial exile and an unfortunate second exile instigated by the coups. The initial exile exists in two forms. The first is textual, with Rama's banishment from Ayodha. The second is historical, with the coolie's migration from India to Fiji. The two are often presented as intermingled. Along with the epical texts, the poems constantly refer to concepts of Indian philosophy as a guide to social reality and expectations. The essential desideratum that the poems maintain is that of the Advaita Vedanta strategy of unity where individuation is surpassed by collective integrity. In an essay, Nandan affirms that identity is not a singular expression but should emerge from a communal effort. Humanity's quest, he writes, is not 'for a narrow egotistical identity but a conquest of it so that one attains the larger identity: to lose oneself to gain a community, to lose one's community to gain a whole country, the quintessential idea contained in the Atman-Brahman concept' (*Paradise*, 35). The notion of self-immolation enters the dynamics of Atman-Brahman, something which Nandan often suggests is characteristic of the Indo-Fijian who sacrificed cultural competition in order to preserve the Fijian way of life. While Maniam similarly builds an Indian spiritual system to explicate social interplay, Nandan's approach to conceiving a non-duality ideal is different as it is hardly ever removed from a water discourse with its heterogenous invocations of the sea, the *kala pani* voyage, the shipwreck, the rhythmic quality of the waves and the ubiquity of rivers not only in Fiji

but in India as well. The poems thus display a migrational ethic, one that is firmly attached to Nandan's conception of a diasporic consciousness. This awareness, as previously discussed in the present chapter, explores how diasporic fluidity is capable of aiding reformulations of the nation. For if the hegemonic boundary maintenance of the nation is co-extensive with the us/them model of racial separatism and exclusion, then the cultural re-pollination of the diasporic subject is problematised when absolutist notions of race, culture and nation are contemporaneously affirmed with home, place and belonging. Nandan attempts to reveal how 'nation' and 'diaspora' are not necessarily antithetical to one another, but could work within a symbiotic network. But first, classicist formulations of the nation have to be reassessed. The very experience of diaspora is marked by hybridity and polymorphism which clearly subvert the circumscriptions generated for traditional national territorialization. In the geopolitics of nation-building, geographical space and its racial ramifications have become synonyms with the construction of identity where autochthony rather than social dialogue retain ancillary demarcations within the nation-state. But as a consequence of the acknowledgement of the importance of diaspora in the 20th and 21st centuries to both global and local sensibilities, diasporic scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Paul Carter and Gopinath, have further urged for the centralisation of migration and diaspora in the formation of the nation. As previously mentioned in the present work, Carter suggests that 'we need to disarm the genealogical rhetoric of blood, property and frontiers and to substitute for it a lateral account of social relations' (*Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language* in Braziel and Mannur, 5). Instead of distinguishing between nation and diaspora, Gopinath postulates that diaspora 'can be seen as part of the nation itself and this destabilized border allows the nation to be rewritten into diaspora' (in Braziel and Mannur, 8).

Thus, fracturing the distinction between nation and diaspora divests the actual liminality of diasporic *and* national identity, while celebrating the otherwise rejected topoi of not only cultural fluidity but cultural syncretism as well, where ‘host’ and diasporic cultures reconstitute themselves in the post-national. But it seems unlikely that Nandan is keen to enter the post-national stage. His passion for national existence is not founded on a logocentric model but a *linkage* of binaries such as migrant and indigenous, diaspora and nation, life and death. The texture of this convergence is fluid, analogous to that of water.

ii) Water discourse

The sea is a vital force in the memorialised and contemporary constitution of the Fijian, both Indian and indigenous. The sense of eternity and infinity that it evokes challenges the spatialization of time, a notion propagated by colonialism in which spatial distance between time-governed ‘savage’ and ‘civilised’ societies is paralleled with geological, ‘natural’ difference on the scale of evolution and ‘progress’. Johannes Fabian in his book *Time and the Other* asserts that space and time were critical to the colonialist project in that ‘the West needed space to occupy. More profoundly and problematically, they required Time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history...In short, *geopolitics* had its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics* (144). The sea thus offers a new spatio-temporal paradigm, just as the narrator of Nandan’s poem “Gift from the Sea” states, ‘on the edges/Of an open sea/ I tread, tremble—for ever’ (ll.1-3). The patulous nature of the sea permits the endlessness of the narrator’s journey, thereby creating an expansive space of ritualistic renewal. Therefore, the narrator continues: ‘Waves from other shores/ Lap

away/ The days of our lives/ Like footprints of forgotten intimacies' (ll.4-7). Traces of life are cleansed upon the sea's shore, leaving a blank canvas for more elements to occupy its space, only to be washed away in a cycle of invitation and disposal. The 'other shores' that the narrator refers to carry the connotations of interconnective spaces as well as the centrality of the sea to the performance of the Great Discoveries where as Torabully states the sea, after that period of adventurous uncovering, was 'seen as inspiring the celebration of courage and richness, and associated to the political wake of peoples of the West' (159). This is why he insists that 'putting one's words on this marine space was also an attempt to let one's *imaginaire* explore the space of the other, and putting oneself, metaphorically, in relation with "otherness", and let one's language engage itself in new webs of relationships' (159). The marine space hence contains the very binaric fracturing that Nandan deems necessary for the activation of a diasporic consciousness. This consciousness runs simultaneously with a historic sensibility, instigated by the sea itself: 'Memories ripple/ In my oceanic mind/ In a distant glowing/ Of the sea' (ll.12-15). The narrator's association of his mentality with the ocean implies an infusion as well as an inseparability of perception and marine subsistence. Thus, it is the oceanic mind that seeks to re-member and if one agrees with Walcott that the sea is history, then the two elements are natural companions, especially for the migrant. The associations of aquatic life are necessarily involved in the sea's tempo. The narrator states that as he 'stood clutching/ The disc of a slipping sun/ A shell with the sea's rhythm/ Shrieked below my feet...I scabble again over sea-shells/ On the beaches/ Of lost memories' (ll.40-48). In an attempt to recover memory, the sea and its connotations have to first be construed so that the narrator and his quest of remembrance can be encapsulated by a marine space: 'Let my soul touch the sea/ Your spirit, O sea, sing in me' (ll.54-55).

This incantation precedes and, henceforth, establishes the recovery of the *kala pani* voyage.

“Lines Across Black Waters” revisits the process of coolie indentureship akin to *The Counting House*’s poetics of migration. The poem, however, is more focused on how the sea determines the course of the *girmitya*’s history in association with post-migrational adaptations. Written in response to the indentured labourer, Totaram Sanadhya’s memoirs, the poem charts both the pragmatic and sentimental effects of indentureship on the exiled coolie. Beginning with the characteristic physical abuse of labourers by the shippers, ‘Small wounds, slowly weeping/ To the cruel rhythm of a whip’ (ll.3-4), the poem progresses to transfer corporeal pain to an emotional and psychical domain. The *kala pani* becomes symbolic of this moral and mental denigration. In this sense, the narrator appears to position the sea as the space of fouling, where the coolie met his ethical and spiritual disintegration: ‘*Kalapani*, black waters, a cross across the seven seas/ With blood, betrayal, grief that never cease/ A fragment, a shard, lay buried/ In the heart’ (ll.11-14). But the black waters do not remain in this negative angle for the narrator is eager to re-member the *girmitya*’s journey without the impediment of censorship: ‘Sharpen your cane knives/ We, too, have ancestors in our lives./ They sailed the ocean/ Stitched like blank pages in a book/ The ships couldn’t read the waves’ (ll.15-19). This memorial recovery is an evocation of language. For if we regard history as language, then every articulation is a sedimentary mark on life. And as the narrator urges his readers to witness the poem’s re-imagining of history, he evokes a literal inscription of poetic lines on the *kala pani*, thus ironically connecting the permanent textualization of the voyage and the illiteracy of the voyaging coolies: ‘The ships couldn’t read the waves,--/ Leonidas, Syria, Danube, Poonah/’ (ll.19-20). The line, ‘the ships couldn’t read the waves’, is an

intriguing one because the inscriptions in reality would have been on the ships, and not on the waves. The implications here are two-fold. Firstly, the ships are representative of the coolies themselves. As most coolies who migrated were illiterate, the fact that both the ships of the poem and the *girmityas* are unable to read, conjoins them. Secondly, if we accept the ship as symbolic of the coolie, then the ship's inability to read the waves is also the coolie's, but this time in a metaphorical sense where the waves signify the uncertainty of the *kala pani* voyage. The poem goes on to chart the coolie's departure and arrival, in a process of migrational memory: 'From a little village to the dark lines/ Twelve thousand miles, sixty thousand lives./ On that unforgettable, *pathar panchali*--/ Rewa, Nausori, Wainbokasi and Nandi:/ *Generations have trod, have trod, have trod*' (ll.26-30). The second reference to 'lines' is illuminated here, signifying the crowded barracks in which the coolies lived. The repetition of the last line alludes to the kinesis of the ship on the long and hazardous voyage to Fiji and the subsequent motion of the *girmitya*'s labour on the sugar plantations where 'all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil' (l.31). The direct quotations from Gerard Manley Hopkins's sonnet, "God's Grandeur", suggest a reflection of Hopkins's convictions about nature, trade and the spiritual role of God in the daily lives of human beings on Nandan's portrayal of indentured labour. Hopkins's sonnet juxtaposes the gruesome labour of men against the beauty of the natural environment and concludes that men have alienated themselves from the grace of God and nature by serving an industrial and economic impetus instead, thereby linking ecological and anti-trade issues with spiritual ones. The narrator of Nandan's poem makes a similar connection by using religious language to emphasise the coolie's toil of labour. For example, the narrator entrenches the position of the sea in the mental, spiritual and emotional constitution of the coolie

by evoking not simply the migrational voyage but the image of the sea as a vessel of death wherein the Hindu notion of reincarnation is highlighted: 'The best were thrown into the sea...Migration is reincarnation' (ll.34-37). The implications of migration as a literal and lateral form of death suggest a diasporic metamorphosis but the poem only hints at this. It is more interested, at this stage, in the initial stages of coolitude where recuperative memory is the crucial first step in contextualizing the coolie. Thus, once 'their journeys were made' (l.36), the narrator begins to highlight the realities of the *girmitya*'s history: 'Plantation by plantation, they build a new world./ Sugar sweet the slave crop/ Elsewhere it had depopulated half the universe/ Here my father's fathers,/ Sleeping on our mother's breasts/ Gave breath and bread to an island' (ll.42-47). By centralizing the course of coolie labour, the poem stresses the inception of the Indo-Fijian as historically vital to the plantation and consequently the economic growth of Fiji. But rather than occupying an affirmative historical position, the Indo-Fijians remain shipwrecked. Inferences of the shipwreck are most often nostalgic and bound to a metaphorical stasis where it becomes the cardinal point to which all other pivotal instances refer. Thus, the ship and the *kala pani* assume the shape of symbols of the wreck or the fall.

In coolitude's discourse, the two elements cannot remain contained in a notional symbology but have to be recovered as a living actuality in coolie history. Merely by re-membering the *kala pani* voyage, with all its pain and trauma, a fundamental aspect of history is brought to light. The sea voyage then is significant because, as Torabully affirms, 'it bears very strange, troublesome, muffled and censored echoes among the Indian descendants. This is because it was a traumatic experience, which was "censored" consciously or unconsciously by those who reached the shores of the host countries' (158). The poem demonstrates not only an

imagining of the voyage, but a marine consciousness which involves an acceptance of elements associated with the voyage. Thus, ‘memories, sands, waves, rays, ships,/ Conchshells cried with the coolie burden’ (ll.62-63). Torabully views the evocation of maritime components as central to the coolie experience: ‘By giving [a] marine essence to the text, what [is] sought [is] not only a poetic universe or atmosphere, but primarily a space where this trauma [can] be revisited, and once this has been done, the sea voyage [is] chosen as the space of the metaphorical construction of a new identity’ (158). As the poem introduces and focuses on this marine space, it also uncovers a narrativisation of the coolie’s journey, thus awarding him a voice with which to render his own tale, which then reveals a process of identity-construction.

The second section of the poem, “Tota’s Tale”, is the story of indentureship from the perspective of a *girmitya* whose personal account of plantation life destabilizes the hegemony of official history. He begins by describing the coolie lines, ‘home of the unaccommodated’: ‘I alone was sent to the haunted line/...An empty line of twenty-four rooms: Eight feet by twelve feet./ Once it housed native workers/ Torn from their villages./ Eight died; Others fled/...Homeless I had come in search of paradise/ This house of hell was now all mine’ (ll.74-84). The *girmitya*’s private emotional reaction to the advent of indentureship is a constituent of the poetics of migration, discussed earlier in *The Counting House*, which exposes the dynamics of indentureship. Beyond a mere factual aspect of colonial history, the psychical representation of individual lives discloses the system as affecting not just human economy but the human condition itself. Religious and spiritual dimensions further fortify the need for an extra-material scope with which to counter the pragmatism of an exploitative structure of labour. Thus, the narrator’s brother’s parting gift to him, *The Gita*, ‘was by my side:/ To him who wisely sees,/ The Brahman with his scrolls

and sanctities,/ The cow, the elephant, the unclean dog,/ The outcast gorging dog's meat, are all one' (ll.92-96). With this realization of unity, the ability to survive the hierarchical nature of colonial rule is heightened. But such religious doctrines do not simply function as routes of survival. More fundamentally, they produce models of identification and inform the creation of a conscious self. Acceptance of the new home is thus centred on *dharma*, or the divine law of being to which the coolie is bound: 'I've no other home/ For me it is the will of God/...Beside me is the Gita' (ll.118-122). The vitality of religion to the day-to-day living of the labourers is evident in the 'readings from the Ramayan,/ Hymns of the Vedas to the sun, the wind/ The ocean, the stones and stars' (ll.127-129). As the *girmityas* attempted to bridge the gap between their faith and the immediacy of their new environment, the space in-between this negotiation uncovers a process of self-composition. But the self, that is being constituted is not a central, egotistical self, rather one that is fluid and interchagable, akin to the texture of water: 'I am the fresh taste of the water; I/ The silver of the moon, the gold o' the sun,/ The word of worship in the Vedas, the thrill/ That passeth in the ether, and the strength/ Of man's shed seed. I am the good sweet smell/ Of the moistened earth, I am the fire's red light,/ The vital air moving in all which moves' (ll.216-222). This permeation and malleability of the self disassociates it from the Cartesian 'I' and places it within a context of liquidity, generated from the migrational voyage and its implications of cultural-religious transference. Nandan often uses types of waterscapes to draw parallels between nature and cultural identity.

In the poem "Voices in the River", for example, the river contains the polyphony of voices that constitute the cross-cultural Fijian experience. Stemming from the philosophy that 'the sea is one', the poem progresses to represent the relationship between versions of water. Rivers and the sea interconnect but retain their

specific identities: ‘...The Ocean/ ...Fed by rivers but remaining the sea always/ And through all’ (ll.121-7). If the sea is still the sea despite being interfused with various rivers, then the rivers will endure their peculiarities because the sea is externalised from existing merely as a *fusion* of rivers and rejects their complete assimilation. Implicit within this interconnective image is a philosophical reasoning based on the Atman-Brahman concept. Analogous to the rivers-sea relationship is the Indo-Fijian identity whose adherence to the ideatum of *atman* will manage to at once preserve his visibility and merge into the *Brahman* of the nation. But beyond the nation is the presence of the natural world with which the Indian-Fijian identifies: ‘O Sun, the atman that burns in you/ Shines in me, too’ (l. 35-6). The higher self within the sun, the universal illuminator and Platonic source of enlightenment and perception, necessarily resides within the old indentured labourer too because his plight is eased by the comfort of identification with something grander and more potent than himself. His self is not isolated, instead, it is linked with a higher self that is in the world around and above him. His identity is universal, but bounded by Indian philosophical reasoning.

In the event of linking a water discourse with an Indian cultural heritage, Nandan often reveals an interstitial space wherein the boundlessness of the former and the formulaic parameters of the latter converge to dissipate binaric thought. The result is an awareness of movement and the perpetuation of ‘becoming’ where seemingly separate notions are able to interject antagonistic territories.

iii) The living dead

The notion of the immaterial co-existing with the tangible is a prevalent

theme, as we have observed in *The Counting House* and *In A Far Country*, in the process of identity-negotiation. This course of construction is part of the efforts at historical recuperation for it acknowledges the simultaneity of the old and the new, the past and the present. Thus, Harris states that a kind of ghostly haunting generates a productive, dialogic site in which the quality of space itself is redefined. For him, 'the haunting and necessary proportions of a new dialogue with reality in all its guises of recovered and revisionary tradition drew me into an anatomy or shared body everywhere in all things and species that give colour and numinosity to space' (43). As ghosts of the past are inserted into the living moment, a temporal continuum is revealed. Harris continues: 'To sail back into the past is to come upon "pasts" that are "futures" to previous "pasts" which are "futures" in themselves to prior "pasts" *ad infinitum*...what lies behind us is linked incalculably to what lies ahead of us in that the future is a sliding scale backwards into the unfathomable past' (49). Consequently, history becomes an active medium of communication between 'what was' and 'what is'. Additionally, as explored in Chapter 3 of the present thesis, the merging of the living and the dead infuses 'place' with a spectral quality, hence illuminating its spatial dimensions. What is recognizable is the colonial death-space that performs the curing of the rift between the spiritual and the material. Torabully stresses the importance of temporal-spatio communication as it rediscovers the baroque interconnections between elements that make up the coolitude mosaic. In the literary domain, this amounts to a kind of bearing witness to history, a necessary redemptive act. For Harris, the writer who 'hosts' history offers humanity 'a ghost of a chance' of redemption. Thus, in writing, the author becomes this host, where his individual personality absorbs into the landscape of the work. He aligns himself with that which haunts his landscape of history and thus becomes immaterial. His lack of substance,

or his immateriality, becomes a way of re-membering, or rather, of bearing witness to the absent presence of his ancestors. Hosting history also involves rendering the immaterial material, where the living become invested in the spirit of the dead. Thus, there are two features of ‘hosting history’: first, the author becomes spectral in his act of bearing witness to history. Second, the object becomes active, and life is given to the dead.

In “Lines Across Black Waters”, Nandan assumes this ghostly position and recovers the voice of the lost coolie, Tota. The first person narrative of the poem places Tota at the forefront of his own tale through Nandan’s own imaginative reconstruction. Thus, when Tota states that ‘I alone was sent to the haunted line/ It was there—apart, like a grave/ Saddening the landscape’ (ll.74-76), the implications are somewhat ironic. In the first instance, the line could indicate a linguistic invention, rather than merely the barracks, and the landscape could denote the textual space of the poem. Thus, Nandan’s poetic lines are haunted by voices of the past whose (hi)stories litter the text/landscape. In the second instance, the line could allude to the coolie barracks which are haunted by the ghosts of coolies who have lived and died within the plantations and whose spectral presences inform the living coolie of the cyclical connection between the dead and the living. After all, as the poem insists, ‘migration is reincarnation’, thus highlighting an occurrence of both death and re-birth within the course of migration. Hence when the narrator of the “The Ghost” states, ‘I fashioned a new world/ With bits from the old’ (ll.18-19), he discloses the linkage between seemingly hostile facets of time. The dead and the living, the old and the new, weave a diasporic tapestry in which baroque elements work together to form a palimpsestic mosaic.

In “The Ghost”, Nandan once again reveals the importance of ghosts in

informing the ways in which the present functions. The poem begins with the narrator who observes ‘an old, old man/ Dead, asleep or just dreaming.../ From his eyes I saw a ghost arise’ (ll.4-6). Véronique Bragard asserts that the presence of old characters, especially grandfathers and grandmothers in literature, testifies to a revival of the past for the illumination of the present. She writes that ‘grandparents are indeed often portrayed as very hardworking, with a strong mind and will. Despite these traits, many of them emerge as ambivalent diasporic heroes who were able to survive and adapt to an alienating and oppressive environment but who suffered greatly from the disorientation associated with it. The grandparent figure acquires a crucial symbolic meaning as it embodies an entire heritage...[the grandparent embodies] the link with India and ancestral rituals’ (118). They thus promote a sense of historical security as well as a crucial link in the temporal chain of migration. Hence, the ghost tells the narrator, ‘think of what I was/ And what you can be/ For I only hope/ As I see you grope/ Your journey from here/ Will be without fear/ As mine might have been’ (ll.56-62). The ghost functions as a historical aspect within the narrator himself for the two are conjoined, as the ghost is by life and death, by a continuity of the migrational journey. This continuity exposes the ghost as the symptom of the narrator, where the former anticipates the latter through ‘history’s outrage’ (l.16). Thus, when he says that ‘we fought with death and won,/ It’s life that’s left me undone!’ (ll.31-32), he highlights the pain of living which the narrator must heal through a rehearsal of the ghost’s life. This redemptive repetition suggests a revisitation of history for the implementation of a better present. The last verse of the poem is indicative of the temporal and generational links that Nandan suggests have to be considered in the quest to dissolve segregative binaries which negate a diasporic continuum: ‘O my father’s fathers/ What forgiveness is there for me?/ O my children’s children/ Listen

to the voices from *Syria*,/ Drowning the silence of the sea!’ (ll.70-74). The lost voices from the past, indicated in the shipwreck of the *Syria*, have to be recovered in a generational amalgamation. In other words, a diasporic consciousness entails a threading of the past, present and future, of ‘fathers’ fathers’ and ‘children’s children’, through an accentuation of the neglected dead. The neglected dead reside within a memorial space that stresses the original journey from India to Fiji, and brings into focus the place of India, as represented by the figure of the old man who is also symbolic of the most immediate link between the two cultural and geographic points within the diaspora. This spiritual resurrection is imperative especially when, as Torabully affirms, ‘the original culture has been erased, tortured, threatened...the human suffering and the yearning for recognition which this obliteration or mutilation has created, cannot be ignored, and the reference to India is more than understandable as one cannot frame his relation to himself and the world ex nihilo’ (149). Thus, geriatric perspectives signify an important contextualization in the process of relation which then feeds into the subsequent kneading of identity.

In the poem “Zoo Story” ‘an old woman in white/...sang songs/ Learnt in another country/ Almost in another tongue/ To the monotonous beating of the drum/ That told of sorrows more than death’ (ll.1-11). Once again, it is the aged character who introduces a pre-migrational culture and mobilizes it with a post-migrational life, described as more grievous than death. But the emphasis of another world, indicated by ‘another country’ and ‘another tongue’ could allude to a supernatural realm wherein earthly distinctions disintegrate. The haunting images of old women in the poem, traditionally associated with ghosts such as banshees, suggest that the setting of the text could very well be an extra-human one. The old woman in white, a classic spectral garb, ‘sat where a corpse had been’, and ‘another old woman/...bares her

bosom to the seawind/...Just wait and watch/ As death battens on life' (ll.2-30). The interfusion between life and death produces more ghostly images where 'on the beach/ A lonely figure drifts/ Twisting her white bosom to the sun' (ll.31-33). Finally, the distinctions between life and death are confused: 'Is it death or life, friend, I am looking at?' (l.45). The collapse of boundaries occurs in an interstitial space, or Taussig's colonial death-space, that performs a healing of the sick or injured. The shamanic experience, of being in-between the dead and the living interrupts monologic discourse where thought, feeling and intuition are exchanged equivocally. The shaman, or in the case of the poem, the narrator, is both witness and subject, the potential and the already become, wherein the arch of becoming is revealed through the labour of reconstruction.

A common trait in Nandan's conception of life is an overwhelming presence of death. But this convergence is not always treated positively by him. While a spectral existence in the previous poems alludes to a possible reinvention of history, the notion of death in poems such as "Siddharth", "A Bloodless Coup?" and "An Inward Death" suggests a negation of life. In "Siddharth", as 'death makes its way/ Day by day, cell by cell/...We live from moment to moment/ On the faith of maya!' (ll.1-8), thus implying the function of death-in-life as a delusory tool. In fact, it is not death as a cessation of life that destroys life. Instead, it is death as the shadow of life that causes the latter's dissipation. Hence the narrator exclaims, ' There's no pain like this body/ Nor no life like this death/ The endless apotheosis/ Of all living' (ll.19-22). In short, despite the inter-binarc involvement, the maintenance of antagonisms due to the wrong kind of death ('this death' implies a particular death, rather than the generic one) negates the interstitiality of the convergence. Death here is most possibly allegorical to racial betrayal, hence signifying the 'death' of a community.

In an attempt to rescue life from 'death', the narrator calls upon Siddharth, 'my son, my father' (l.50) and therefore a symbol of diasporic continuity. Siddharth possesses 'eyes lit with another life' (l.51), once again as in "Zoo Story", an allusion to a non-tellurian space. Of course Siddharth is already a religious figure, being the Gautama of Buddhism and thus holds the capacity for divine enlightenment. The narrator depends on the spirituality of Siddharth to educate the Indo-Fijian community on the materiality of life, removed from a death instinct: 'Siddharth, once again,/ Follow your own footsteps/ Over ashes and blades of grass/ And teach us to live in life, from Life!' (ll.72-76). This rehearsal of a religious journey implies a return to the past, as a cleansing ritual, where life can be resurrected from the dead and repossessed as its own entity. This seems imperative in a Fijian climate, as the narrator of "An Inward Death" informs us, where 'you are/ Dying-knowing/ It is not necessary/ That some volcanic fission/ Should reduce the world/ To its original atoms/ What your death is doing/ Every moment of your life!' (ll.52-59). The fission that has caused this individuation is the succession of coups which dissolved both communal and inter-communal integrity. The narrator highlights a global link in the event of such tragedies: 'A cataclysmic event/ The holocaust/ Of Austchwitz-Shatila-Sabra/ All made by men like you and me/ A shipwreck on Nasilai reef' (ll.4-8). By doing this, he alludes to an expansion of fates and the relationality of diasporas, where 'deaths' have often marred the face of life. Thus when the narrator of "A Bloodless Coup?" refers to hibiscus petals that are 'turning the dust into blood red/ From the broken arteries of the living dead' (ll.18-19), the idea of the 'living dead' implies a state of lifeless living generated by various injustices.

The two versions of death-in-life that Nandan proposes illuminate how the interfusion of life and death can create a restitutive space where history is revisited,

but it can also infer a violation of a community. By exposing how a spectral 'hosting of history' is able to recall the voices of the past, Nandan also demonstrates, by implication, how a denial of this ghostly evocation presents itself in an antagonism between life and death. Ultimately, Nandan is interested in re-imagining history, in hearing the silenced voices of the dead coolies, for a clarification of Fiji's current dilemma. It is in the act of narration itself, whether in prose or poetry, that Nandan sees a possible route of redemption: 'The act of writing is perhaps the most revolutionary technology invented by the human mind. Writing *is* revolution' (*Paradise*, 115). The text becomes the event, and not simply a recounting of the event. In this sense, it becomes the site of history's transfiguration. Echoed in this notion are Nietzsche's concepts of the 'Eternal Return' and 'Critical History'. In order to live, Nietzsche says, man has to have the strength to break up a part of the past. In this effort, he creates a fantasy past from which he would like to originate, thus alluding to an innocence of becoming (in Dave Robinson, 20). This can be linked to Walcott's notion of the Adamic man whose creative act is to dig deep into newness. After all, as Dabydeen states, if one cannot re-member, then elements of history must be re-fabricated.

iv) Prophetic vision of the past

One method of de-mythologizing the objectivity and 'truth' of history is the interjection of mythology into the telling of one's story. Because myths are culturally particular and, as Robert Fraser writes, 'can perhaps be described as stories that a culture tells itself in an attempt to define its uniqueness' (162), they are able to function as topical narratives that encapsulate a collective past while simultaneously

controverting the singularity of dominant historical discourses. Their dissolution of historical and allegorical boundaries comments on the nature of history and its fabrication. Most importantly, the interposition of myths into the foundation of history engenders a multidimensionality necessary for the creation of an inclusive past. The regenerative potential of myth is also fundamental for the positive structuring of a cultural identity as Fraser states, ‘myths have characteristically served as foci for the identity of a resurgent population’ (167). Thus, ‘mythological history’ is an affirmation of a culture’s annals.

Indian mythology is characterised by its variety and coeval versions of the same story. Even the putatively established epic poem the *Ramayana* is heterogeneous, although the most popular lection is Valmiki’s rendition. But even his *Ramayana* has been specifically assimilated by Indians of the diaspora, particularly in Fiji, to explicate their predicament. It is through analogy to their plight that they redefine the characters of the *Ramayana* and reconstruct the text’s implications.

In an allegorical mode, the mythological histories in Nandan’s poems “Arjuna’s Anguish”, “A Churning in Oceania” and “The Second Banishment” are directly interfused with the fate of Indian-Fijians. The relevance of myth to present circumstances, the uninterrupted connections between the past to the present, foundationalises the re-historicisation of diaspora and its subjects in what Edouard Glissant has termed ‘a prophetic vision of the past’. This reconstructive mode overlays ‘an allegorical cultural map upon the narrative of official history to effectively “reshape” it’ (Ashcroft, 108). The very concept of history as a mode of factual rendition is destabilized by the potential that allegory offers. Slemon writes that ‘postcolonial allegories are concerned with neither redeeming nor annihilating history, but with displacing it as a concept and opening up the past to imaginative

revision' (165). The idea of creative reconstruction is liberating in that it positions history not as a 'set of immovable past achievements but a discourse, open, as are all discursive practices, to reinterpretation' (Slemon, 164). Thus, the interweaving of mythology into history demonstrates firstly, the strength of collective memory and secondly, the fluidity of history itself. The re-tracing of the past is part of Harris' 'Infinite Rehearsal' where the process of a continual return *into* history is necessary 'to exhume the fossils of history that are buried in [the] Unconscious' (4)

Nandan utilizes this dissolution of demarcations between myth and history to narrativize the past as temporally linked with the present. In "Arjuna's Anguish", for example, a mythological layer of narrative is appended to a contemporary situation. Part one of "Arjuna's Anguish" conflates the story of the feud between the Pandava and the Kaurava cousins in the *Mahabharata* with the military coup in Fiji. Characters from the epic poem are analogised with Fiji's racial population in a re-telling of the country's history. The House of Parliament wherein the coup was staged is parallelised with the temple where Karna, the Pandavas's half-brother, challenged his own flesh-and-blood, Arjuna, to a duel. Just as Karna was Arjuna's 'twin in the shameless sun' (l.29), the Fijians and the Indians, 'offspring of Cain and Abel' (l.75), are also connected by blood. But one has betrayed the other in 'the face of treason' (l.33) and the Kauravas too, battling with the Pandava brothers, had betrayed their cousins. The first part of the poem ends with the banishment of the Pandavas which is likened to both the migration of the indentured labourers to Fiji and their banishment following the coup caused by their 'blood brother' (l.92) who cast 'the die and a deathless shadow/ Across the murderous innocence of the seven seas/ Into the lives of little isles' (ll.93-5).

In "The Second Banishment", this sense of treachery is once more narrativised

through mythology, this time through the story of Rama's return to Ayodhya in the *Ramayana*. Exiled for fourteen years, Rama 'returned home/ To Ayodhya' (ll.1-2) but instead of domestic rest he 'saw blood in his courtyard' (l.5) where Rakshas were performing 'holy violence, / strangling an ancient innocence' (ll.18-9).

Metonymically, Rama is the Indian-Fijian who has returned to his home in Fiji only to find that his race has been betrayed by a colonel and his military (Rakshas). Feeling isolated and ashamed, Rama perceives that 'this city, a Golgotha, / Without joy, without grace, / Has banished me again, / Betrayed my childhood place/ When I thought/ I'd redeemed its sorrows by sacrifice' (ll.39-44). Homeless in a putative home, Rama, who had thought that his self-immolation had aided the growth of Ayodhya/Fiji, is coerced to 'live alone/ Another unforgiving exile' (ll.45-6). The Indian-Fijian, once banished from India to Fiji, is now banished again, from Fiji to elsewhere. Seemingly rootless, or rather frequently uprooted, the Indian-Fijians require a fortified history to imagine themselves as a people.

In "A Churning in Oceania" this history is told through the myth of the churning of the ocean. The greed of the gods and the asuras prompts them to begin churning the ocean for 'power over the three worlds' (l.16) which can only be obtained through the drinking of a potent elixir found within the depths of the ocean. In the ensuing battle between the two parties, analogised with the British and the Fijians, the *girmityas* are precluded from participation in the churning. Voiceless and abandoned even by Vishnu who closed 'his third eye on the *girmityas*' (l.35), they still sacrifice themselves for the greater good of life. Shiva, the *girmitya*'s grandson drinks 'a jar of potent potion/ That could destroy creation itself' (ll.46-7) in order to save the asuras and gods. Despite this self-abnegation, the churning is resumed and consequently '*dharma* was disrupted/ A balance broken, betrayed' (ll.54-5). The

tension of the *girmitya*'s history, that is, his subjection to the avarice of colonialism and the autochthonous supremacy practiced in his new home, is accentuated by the addition of mythology to a seemingly settled history. Because history is never simply one story, the utilization of a 'prophetic vision of the past' splits and multiplies history's journey so that it is diverted into numerous roads. Boundaries between the allegorical and the historical are successfully blurred in the mythologizing of history for the literary coincides with the factual to open up a new space of inclusion and constant evolvment. The *girmitya*, therefore, defines his voice in this space where, never quite figurative and never quite veritable, he asserts his alterity.

The voyage into history signifies a reassessment of the coolie's voice, which as we have previously explored, has been shipwrecked. The centralization of cultural metaphors acts as a way into the activation of history as a living, pulsating entity, that includes rather than excludes. Nandan's perception of history as cyclical echoes that of Torabully's in *Cale D 'Etoiles Coolitude* where "The Book of the Voyage" remains the pivot in the cycle of history. Despite being subjected to betrayal, Nandan maintains that coolie rehabilitation resides within an oceanic inference where the lines 'written' across the *kala pani* denote a migrational articulation. This notion is of course in sync with coolitude's poetics of coolie renewal. Carter and Torabully assert that 'coolitude explores the concept of the ocean as a nodal moment of migration, a space of destruction of identity, yet also one of regeneration, when an aesthetics of migration was created' (24). In "A Broken Wheel?", Nandan affirms that 'the chariot of history/ Is still/ In revolution'(ll.1-3), thus alluding to history as a process, rather than an archive. In this vein, as various historical moments are 'spotlighted', the poem finds a portal into revitalization: 'Who knows lost truth/ May seek shelter/ Under a broken wheel/ And find itself anew' (ll.41-44). The persistence of creative

reconstruction, therefore, reveals that history is a cycle within a circle, capable of producing endless versions of narratives wherein multiple voices correlate in a dialogic polyphony.

Conclusion

*‘Time kaleidoscopes. The past is refracted back and forth, becomes the present, is highlighted by it, is illuminated by it, is replaced by it. In this rush of sparkle and eclipse, only the future is obscured, predictably shattered. Yesterday becomes today, today steps back from itself, and tomorrow might never be’—(Neil Bissoondath, *A Casual Brutality*, 18).*

Bissoondath’s conceptualization of time is reminiscent of the temporal elasticity briefly explored in Chapter 1 of the present thesis. The ability to challenge conventional directions of time, which as a natural consequence, implores the re-visioning of space, reforms the seemingly set structure of history. Henceforth, the issue of tempo-spatial mobilization appears in the memorial conundrum of what and how to re-member. If the past, present and future are entities existing in a horizontal equilibrium, then how is history to be treated? In the light of the fact that the cultural problematic in post-indenture societies eventuates from an historical abyss, the restitution of history has been the obvious primary concern of Dabydeen, Maniam and Nandan. All three have attempted to explore the very notion of history itself, undoubtedly in varying degrees, and have ultimately emphasized the endlessness and continual potentiality of the past, thereby confirming their adherence to the idea of the simultaneity of temporal facets. Dabydeen and Maniam in particular experiment with the cyclical nature of history, in line with Torabully’s own concept of circular memory in *Cale D’Etoiles Coolitude*. Nandan’s more literal approach is reflective of coolitude’s focus on the sea and its marine implications. But what unites the writers, despite their divergent methods, is a dedication not only to a restoration of history but to a rigorous revisitation of it. Barnor Hesse writes that ‘the ethics of postcolonial memory concerns itself less with historical “wrongs” of the colonial question than with interrupted and incomplete forms of decolonization and their relation to

contemporary social constructions of injustice/justice' (165). In the specific case of diasporic memory, the sense of interruption is certainly an issue of imperfect decolonization, but it is also a dilemma of inadequate social integration where certain cultural elements are denied the right to contribute their story to the entire body of historical accounts. Thus, disjointed histories appear outside of the official sphere of history; in Dabydeen's case, they are 'scraps', Maniam refers to them as 'fragments' and Nandan suggests that they are 'ruins' which when pieced together form a neglected yet valid version of history.

The table of contents in *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* comments on the intentions of the concept. The progression of themes reads as follows: "The Coolie Odyssey: A Voyage in Time and Space", "Thrice Victimized: Casting the Coolie", "Surviving Indenture", "Reclaiming The 'Other': Diaspora Indians And The Coolie Heritage", "Some Theoretical Premises Of Coolitude", "Conclusion: Revoicing the Coolie". An introduction to coolitude itself begins with the notion of travel and of the coolie's crossing of time and space through a voyage of victimization. But the poetics refuses to remain stagnant within a politics of blame and self-pity, and furthers its cause by highlighting the survival techniques which have allowed the coolie the opportunity to reinvent himself, thereby re-ordering spaces of redemption. All the texts studied in this thesis have displayed some aspects of coolitude's chart of coolie renewal: *The Counting House's* journey through the poetics of migration, the baroque implications of *Our Lady of Demerara*, the generational and historical cycle in *The Return, In A Far Country's* dissolution of racial boundaries through a temporal-spatio rebellion, the geographical evocations and formal hybridity in *The Wounded Sea* and *Lines Across Black Water's* re-membering of the *kala pani* voyage. It is striking that despite social and geographical distances,

the writers have managed to demonstrate parallel yet unique manifestations of their coolitude inclinations. As the title of the present work suggests, this comparative study is intended to expose a coolie cartography through historical and cultural proximity, but without sacrificing the heterogeneity of diasporic being. Thus, what emerges from a reading of the texts is a mosaic of coolie experiences which nevertheless belong to the same fabric. The map that discloses the links between Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji highlights that while the basis for connectivity is solid, the route can also be extended to include various post-indenture societies such as South Africa, Trinidad, Mauritius and so on, not as generalized coolie factors in synonymous situations, but as strong individual societies that require in-depth attention before analogies are made between them. Thus, the map drawn in this thesis has sought to provide enough space for each country, without the hindsight of comparison, so as to create singular atmospheres, which when connected, unravel their similarities all the more clearly.

In his essay on Neil Bissoondath and Ben Okri, David Richards writes that ‘maps are indices, not of the situation of the self located in time and space but symbols of splitting and division and the consequences of history’ (74). As the texts tell their own history, where the self is indeed located in time and space, the map that draws the texts together creates its own history, through the ‘splitting and division and the consequences of history’ and which, in this case, is revelatory because certain frontiers are crossed. The most prominent boundaries traversed are the historical and the social which are illuminated through a coolitude sensibility. In the first instance, the historical amnesia of the *kala pani* voyage, which led to an inevitable cultural void, is revisited and healed when the writers take on the role of the host of history. As previously mentioned, when the writer becomes spectral and assumes the position

of the observer rather than the dogmatic preacher, the seemingly enclosed world of history opens up. Thus, the cycle of coolitude, which promotes an endless revision of events, is brought forth to highlight the process of becoming. History is de-conditioned and emphasis is given to what Torabully has referred to as the ‘murmur from the hold’ (171) which belonged to the coolies as they were leaving India on board the ship. Coolitude, he states, hovers between ‘a past confined in silence or censorship, and creolization’ (171), hence stressing the connection between the past as history and the present as social interplay. But of course the past and the present are not distanced by conventional assumptions of ‘then’ and ‘now’. Instead, they are brought together to form a complex culture, which, as Torabully affirms, brings ‘to the *imaginaire* a part of the other’ (168).

It has been established that coolitude and hence the texts of this thesis interfuse temporal phases in order to challenge the rubrics of colonial sensibilities, and this method is indeed by no means unique in the domain of postcolonial counter-strategies. It can be named as an indispensable aspect of such processes, but it may also require an interrogation as to why yet another tactic of recovery is needed. But as we have already discovered, coolitude emerges to fill the void of the coolie element in societies ranging from the Caribbean to Asia. Véronique Bragard describes the surfacing of coolitude with precision: ‘After the Négritude movement, which sought to recover and assert the richness of black culture and values, after Antillanité which attempted to understand the Caribbeanness that exists beyond island boundaries, after créolité that seeks to reclaim creoleness and establish a literary identity, comes coolitude, which endeavors to validate coolie history and culture, to take possession of an entangled past that other generations “had evaded as an area of shameful bondage”’ (280). However, I will argue that coolitude does not remain merely to

satisfy a sector of neglect and that although it is partly formed from recuperative traditions before it, it stands alone on several aspects.

Firstly, while coolitude may resemble Créolité in its emphasis on Relation and *metissage*, it parts from the latter in its concentration on marine symbologies which makes it a relevant *diasporic* poetics as the sea carries implications of voyaging and migration. Thus, instead of the rhizome, which is a creature of the land, the coral, a hybrid of the sea, not only represents the borderlessness of migrant identity but opens up intercontinental spaces such as the ones in this thesis. Most importantly, the present work could not have been executed using Créolité instead of coolitude as the former does not apply to Malaysian and Fijian societies. The same can be said of dougla poetics, which may be extremely pertinent in a Caribbean or Mauritian context, but would fail to extend its suitability to the Asian or Pacific situation. Hence, coolitude emerges as a truly *diasporic* concept that manages to bring together coolie communities which would have easily remained in their own racial or national compartments.

Secondly, coolitude makes its first claim on labour and not on a racial issue, although by implication, the Indian constituent is highlighted. This suggests that unlike Négritude and Indianité (racial essentialism), Antillanité (geographical essentialism) and Créolité (inadequate emphasis on the racial element), coolitude has managed both to surpass racial or locational orthodoxy while also retaining a degree of racial grounding in order to highlight disenfranchised groups. This trait enables a more cohesive understanding of societies like Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji where racial discrimination is a daily reality that needs to be illuminated and gradually overcome. By giving enough attention to racial histories but also dispelling attempts to exclusively explore them independently, coolitude finds a balance between assertion

and assimilation.

Thirdly, instead of jumping on the hybridity bandwagon, coolitude favours cross-culturality instead, which suggests the ‘self-recognition of one civilization in the culture bed of the other’ (Harris, 48). Thus in terms of the history of labour, coolies, regardless of race, are able to identify their plights and cultural evolution in one another through a proletariat struggle for a betterment of their lives. Additionally, the notion of cross-culturality promotes an awareness of inter-dependency in multiracial societies, rather than separate segments existing together within a particular context.

Finally, coolitude’s attitude towards history is crucial for the recovery of many postcolonial societies. It advocates a space of observation in-between the past, the present and the future so as to never forget yet never dwell. We are here reminded of Walter Benjamin’s description of the angel of history:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (in Wolin, 61).

This tug-of-war between the past and the future is what Torabully suggests is needed because it provides contention and therefore movement and change.

As a poetics to describe the Indian labour diaspora, coolitude succeeds in making its point by stressing the coolie odyssey, the pertinence of the *kala pani*, the complications of migration, the cultural adaptations of coolie communities and the constant interplay between coolies and their social contemporaries. But its lack of

exposure to the academic, literary and political spheres of the Anglophone world means that although it speaks to and about global coolie communities, it is ironically contained within a small Francophone space of debate. Therefore, I hope that this thesis will create interest and henceforth inspiration to carry on the study of coolitude within various contexts, not merely the literary. The potential of coolitude to be used in explorations of first generation (or the old diaspora) and subsequent migrations (the new diaspora) is vast. While Véronique Bragard and myself have attempted the former, there is an exciting field to be discovered in the latter, especially when studied alongside issues such as refugees, xenophobia, terrorism and globalisation.

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